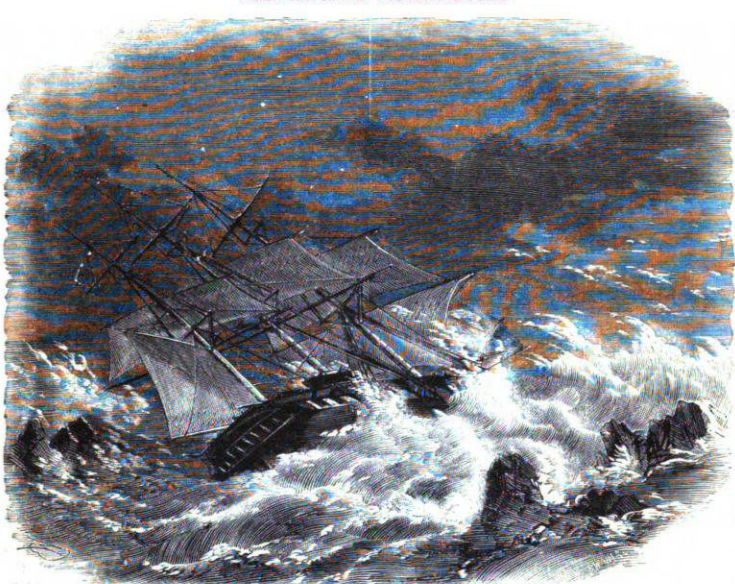


THE DEVIL'S HORSE-SHOE.



SHORTLY after my *first* entry into her Majesty's service on board the —, I was placed under the tutelage of an old quartermaster to learn the arts of knotting, splicing, plating, &c., then deemed of the first importance both to the tyro himself and the service at large. This hard-featured, weather-beaten veteran of the ocean was of the true school whence Britain draws her choicest hearts of oak—the North Sea trade. With a thorough knowledge of his duty as a seaman, he had an abundant fund of credulity and superstition, which he brought out when favourable opportunities offered. His predilection for and faith in the marvellous, so far from being corrected by the experience of a long life of observation, had increased and strengthened with his years.

I have mentioned this old tar because I met with him again, some years after I had left the navy, under circumstances unusually dramatic. Urgent affairs drew me home from foreign service, and an old family friend, in command of one of the finest frigates in the Royal Navy, offered me a cast over the Atlantic. I accepted his kindly offer, and on ascending the decks of the frigate, the first man I encountered was the old quartermaster.

My friend Captain — was a tall, spare-topmast looking man, rather brusque in his appearance, but most gentlemanlike in his manners, and a thorough seaman. He rather shunned

than courted society, and his retiring habits obtained for him the character of being haughty; but those who were best acquainted with his merits declared him to be a very pleasant unassuming companion, with a mind richly stored and well cultivated. The first lieutenant was a very promising young man, quick in perception, and possessing an eye that would ferret out a truant ashore when invisible to every one else. The second lieutenant was a harem-scarem blade, whose head was literally cracked by a severe cut he had received from a monster Malay pirate; indeed, but for the impenetrability of his skull, it must have been shattered to pieces—its thickness saved him. He was a rigid disciplinarian, at times a complete tartar, though of a generous nature. The other officers were rather commonplace characters—gentlemen and well-tutored seamen, but all within the average.

The land disappeared; the expanse of ocean, with its ever-rolling waves, surrounded us; the breeze was fresh and fair, cresting the billows with a feathery foam; and onward we sped, parting the waters hither and thither, and dashing along through the white and hissing spray, as if the majestic ship felt that she was throned upon her own dominions. But there were some who looked doubtfully upon the swelling sails, for their light frames were unequal to bear the cold chill of the keen northern blast, and they sighed for the warm

and sunny climes in which they had first drawn the breath of life. To them England was the land of the stranger; and the heaven to which they hoped to have access, when called hence by the angel of death, was of a far different description to that of the British islander. He was returning after years of absence from his native home, which he had left at the bidding of high and chivalrous enterprise—the prospects of fame and fortune which had urged so many to abandon the delights of friendship and the sweets of love, to serve in that empire of the East, where life and death, luxury and privation, soft repose and severe duties are constantly moving hand in hand, holding mysterious brotherhood.

Away we went, bowling down the high latitudes with every sail set and an increasing breeze. It was in November. The whole afternoon the wind had been steadily strengthening. It was now blowing fresh, and some sail was taken in. The evening approached, when the second lieutenant observed to me, that if the wind increased at this rate we should soon be scudding under double reefed topsails.

From some pencil-marks on the ship's chart, it appeared that we were in the neighbourhood of one of those *rigia*, or mysterious rocks, that are said to be situated in different parts of the ocean, but whose position and existence is uncertain, and their precise situation unmarked. They are assumed to be of volcanic origin, to be reefs just above or below the surface of the ocean, to appear or disappear, and leave no sign. These unknown dangers, if they exist, are far more appalling, even to the stoutest hearts, than all the real and visible horrors of death by flood and field. Here was a fine opportunity for the display of the superstition and knowledge of the old quartermaster. He was the first to discover that we were in the neighbourhood of the mysterious rock; and he soon communicated the information to the crew, who quickly manifested their appreciation of the unknown danger by a subdued and serious tone of stealthy talk. A strong anxiety was visible in their countenances, and plainly showed that they had a strong feeling among them of their awful position. This feeling, however, did not paralyse their energies; on the contrary, they moved to the performance of every duty, noiselessly indeed, but with a zeal and alacrity that almost anticipated the orders of their officers.

The old quartermaster, an especial favourite of the captain, ventured to address the latter on the quarter-deck, in the strong hope that a suggestion he wished to make would receive favour, and release the ship from the impending danger.

"It will be best to get as far to the north and eastward as we can, sir," he said; "for then we will have the breeze more southerly, and be well to windward of some nasty reefs laid down about here."

"We must hold on as we are, quartermaster; steer as you say, and we shall get into the vortex of the hurricane, which, I think is blowing great guns somewhere in the direction you indicate."

The old salt retired discomfited.

The evening was rapidly approaching, and the heaving, rising swell was becoming more and more agitated, as if lashing itself into fury to resist the

strength of the coming gale. The breeze continued freshening. Gallantly did the noble craft climb the snow-white tops of the billows, and then slide gracefully down the glacis of waters into the valley below: it is true we occasionally shipped some wild seas, but that was owing to the excitement of Neptune, who was possibly jealous at seeing a bark more lovely than the fairest shell in his ocean-bed, breasting his foaming surge.

After dinner and grog, both of which ceremonies were interlarded with varied speculations on the existence of the mysterious reef we were said to be near, and which few believed in, I ascended to the deck to take one more look on the scene before turning in. The moon was but three or four days' old. It was one of those nights when, setting early, she, at intervals, peeped out through dark black scud, that swiftly swept along, and told of the coming gale, which already whistled in hollow sounds through the trembling rigging, the immense strings of that mighty Æolian harp, a British first-class frigate.

As I listened the cry of "All's well!" resounded through the ship.

One lone star of the first magnitude near the horizon twinkled like a beacon over the bosom of the troubled waters, when down came the gale curling up the waves and sweeping away their foam in sheets of misty whiteness, through which the sea-bird darted in exultation, uttering his wild and piercing cry. But the moon. Ah, the moon! Never shall I forget the heavy debt of gratitude I owe to her soft and cheering light, as her hope-inspiring face guided and nerved us through the danger that was to come! We were scudding before a strong sea, and whilst I watched the raging billows break and tear after us, nearly two hours passed away. As I looked on, I fancied the style of sea changed every now and then; that there were, in fitful moments, unusually white waves ahead, and that the dark water assumed a thicker tinge. I spoke of it to the second lieutenant, who had just come up. He, however, probably from not having been long on deck, and the change in these appearances having taken place gradually, did not perceive at first what was so obvious to my eyes. Upon this I went forward upon the fore-castle, and called the attention of the boatswain to what I observed: he was instantly struck with the same appearances, and went aft and pointed them out to the lieutenant, who seemed now suddenly to awake all at once from his apathy. Just as I was turning round, a snow-white wave that could not be mistaken, suddenly flashed upon my eyes, and in a moment the cry of "Breakers ahead!" flew through the ship.

In an instant every soul rushed on deck, and it was easy to see by their expressive features that all chance of deliverance was gone. All eyes were turned towards the captain, who had ascended from his state-room the moment the alarm was given. He rushed forward to peer into the darkness, and there he saw, at about two cables' length distant, of a horse-shoe shape, a low, long line of reef, not only ahead of us, but on both sides, almost abeam. The survey took but a second; and whilst he, coolly and unmoved,

regarded awful and inevitable destruction to all on board, and saw not the faintest glimmer of hope for escape, the officers and men looked to their commander as to one with whose abilities they were long acquainted, and whose thorough seamanship and resources would be sure to extricate them, if human skill could do so. For a moment the thought struck us all, that by putting her helm down and bringing her close to the wind, we might work out of the semicircle of rock by which we were environed. But neither time nor space would allow of such a course. We were in the very middle of the danger,—the foaming water on every side. But this was not all. The mysterious rock anchored in the midst of a vast ocean, bearing a name, too, that at such a moment struck dismay into all hearts,—the very uncertain and unknown character of the peril, the fearful unknown grave,—all conspired to strike down the hardihood of the stoutest heart on board. The brave ship flew towards the rock as if she had been invited there. The dark, frothy line of reef appeared in awful proximity, and each moment we expected to feel the keel grinding in sure destruction on its rugged surface. We rushed on, and in the heavy darkness no opening appeared. Just then an enormous sea, whose dark and ominous bulk was crowned with foam, that shone and glistened like the light which sometimes presages the mountain's disruption, rolled in swift and menacing convolutions toward the ship, and breaking upon her stern with a terrific crash, lifted her high up upon its bosom. Just then the moon—blessed moon!—unveiling herself from the scudding clouds, threw her light upon the scene. The quick eye of the captain in a moment saw an opening in the line of reef, though so far off, on our port bow, that it appeared doubtful whether we could fetch it. In a second the order went forth: "Down with the helm. Starboard. Hard a-starboard."

The yards were hauled round, and she flew towards the wind, with the rebound of the dashing spray from the reef almost washing the ship. As she was thus luffing-up, a gigantic sea struck her abeam. For a moment the ship, yielding to the mighty pressure, lay almost broadside to the sea, stunned and writhing, as it were, beneath the blow. Our revived agony lasted but a few seconds: the vessel quickly recovered, shook herself, righted, and flew up to the wind. The opening in the reef now appeared well on our lee bow. Every seaman was stationed to some special duty; steady hands were at the wheel; and away we flew under sail so wholly disproportioned to the strength of the gale and the point on which we were sailing, that she was inclined at a fearful angle towards the lee. The waves were fierce and terrible in their assaults, running to an enormous height, and broken and boiling. When within two cables' length of the channel, the old quarter-master, who was at my elbow, pointed out to me two pieces of floating wreck, to which some hapless wretch was still clinging with desperate grasp, whilst the wild sea-birds skimmed round his head, and uttered their tempest screams in his ears. The cries for help were heard amid the howlings of the gale,—for the wise Creator has

given to man, in his perilous distress, a voice that is easily distinguishable from all other sounds,—but no help could be afforded, and doubtless hundreds there had been hurled into one common grave.

In making for the opening, we had diagonally neared the reef so fast, that the rebound from the surface of the rock meeting the rolling billows as they advanced, so completely enveloped us in its wreath of spray and dashing waters, that our maintop sail was almost becalmed, and hung down the mast. Again we mounted on the billows' crest, and the distended sails seemed ready to burst from the bolt-ropes. Again we descended the deep abyss, and the men stood mute in breathless silence, watching the rising wave, almost abeam, which had it broke would have engulfed us there for ever. The conflict was awful! The advancing sea struggling with the recoil, threw up its monstrous head, and dashed and foamed in wild impetuosity. The crested billow curled its white top, and a shuddering instinct went from heart to heart: though all stood silent, yet every man was firm in purpose.

The decisive moment had arrived. We had weathered the opening!

"Heave up the helm!"

"Square the after yards!"

"Starboard!"

"So! Steady!"

"Port! Hard a-port!"

The ship flew before the wind, and we entered a narrow channel, not half a cable's length in width. The surging, raging sea completely enveloped us in a mass of ponderous spray and flying water, above our heads and around us; and the roll of the sea being now astern, we were alternately lifted up to a frightful height and sunk down till we expected to hear the ship's bottom grate on the rocks. There was scarce a breath of wind in these fearful chasms, yet we could see the feathery foam flying with amazing velocity over our mastheads as it drifted on the wings of the storm. Again we were lifted on the raging element, and received a fresh impulse from the gale, again we rushed down the descent, and the brilliant frigate, in her headlong course, often yawed and deviated so much from the track as nearly to bring her broadside to the sea. But she was promptly met by the helm, and when she caught the flying wind it had its full effect, and we were saved. Several times were we in a threatening grave, which yawned to receive us, but the gallant ship of war held on her way, and passed through a passage between whole sheets of broken water that poured upon our decks—so narrow was the channel, and so impetuous were the breakers. As we passed the last margin of rock, and were under the lee of the reef, a wild British cheer burst from every breast. We were clear of the foaming mist and spray of the angry waters; the moon shining her last shine before dipping into the horizon, unfolded to us at one view the splendid panorama of a vast ocean swelled and tormented to a tempest.

Not a man left the deck that night; terrors, jets, thankfulness to Providence, speculations

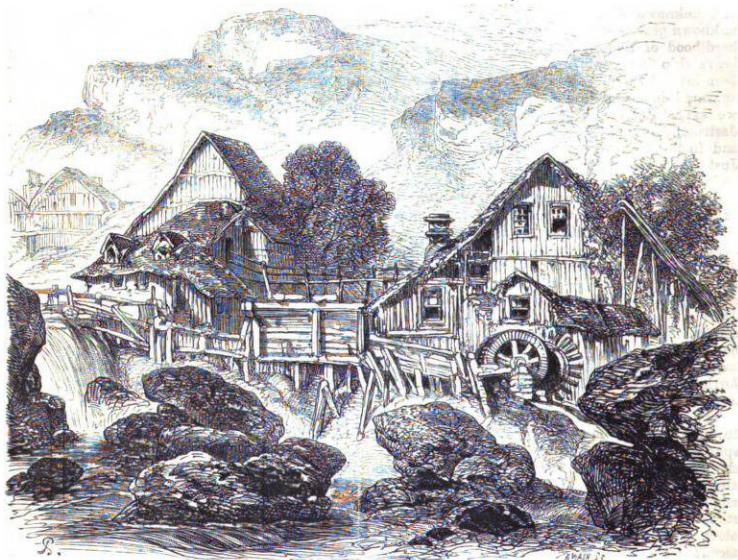
upon the horrors of the Devil's Horse-shoe were adopted in turn, according to the taste of individuals. No man present will forget the thrilling danger of that awful night. To the writer the frightful adventure clings to him with fearful remembrances.

The captain took some rough note of the position of the reef, which we watched in glad yet nervous suspense till it disappeared in the dark waters near the horizon. It appeared to stretch over a distance of about three miles in a north-west and south-westerly direction, with its concave

side and wings facing the east. The line of this fearful reef was easily traceable as far as the eye could see by a margin of white foam.

The day dawned, and the gale bowed its might before the glories of the rising sun, as if in homage to its resplendent brightness; but the fatal reef had revelled in the darkness of the night, smiting its victims with destruction and dismay. Death rode upon the winged blast, and his prey was buried in the great charnelhouse of the deep. Our own escape from the horrors of the Devil's Horse-shoe was doubtless unprecedented. C.

CHALETS IN THE JURA.



[See p. 247.]

LEAVING Orbe, while the mists of early morning are still hanging about its old dark streets, we begin our gradual ascent in the direction of the Châlet Delessert. My companion and guide to this elevated point of the Jura, a tall and energetic man, with his well-used herbarium slung on his shoulder, is the *pharmacien* of the town. Think not contemptuously of my friend, because his small *pharmacie* is not resplendent with coloured liquids and engraven brass—he is earnest and well educated, the third of his generation who, in the same unpretending locale, is dispensing healing and consolation to the inhabitants of his native town and the mountain villages around. You might have guessed his vocation from his dress and demeanour, and the more easily from

his having that pale brow and diahevelled hair, peculiar to clever chemists of all countries; he has something instructive or amusing to say on all subjects, and speaks French in most unexceptionable purity.

How pleasantly passed the first hours of our mountain ramble—now on the winding high road, where we meet the night diligence from Paris, with its dusty, sleepy occupants, and the five greys trotting and jingling with slackened traces down the gradual descent—now we pass over broad pastures—then, by narrow paths, through forests of fir, or along dried torrent-beds, or at the foot of high grey crags, where my companion suddenly finds a scarce botanical specimen. Further on he points to the precipice from which

a young botanist of Orbe, in his too eager search for the same plant, had fallen. As we stood where his mutilated body was found, how pathetic and picturesque was the description of the sad event, which he concluded with an apt quotation from Ovid, as he remarked the unusual quantity of bright flowers which grew in the immediate neighbourhood.

Higher up, on the mountain side, we pass through a black and gloomy village, partially destroyed by fire; the uncleared ruins still standing on either side of the narrow and ill-paved streets. I would willingly have sketched the quaint old fountain, with its fantastic iron work and granite column, and those four full jets of limpid crystal; but there is something so repulsive in the old crones, who are defiling with their villanous "blanchissage," the cistern of pure water, that I prefer for subject the picturesque chalet, into which my friend has entered—no doubt to administer the contents of that bottle, whose safety has caused him so much uneasiness in our rough climb up the mountain.

He would indeed be a skilful artist, who could faithfully give the colour and detail of that high roof and massive chimney, the compact scantling,—here bleached to a silver grey by the action of the weather, there decaying, in richest brown, from the dripping of the overhanging foliage—huge lofts apparently inaccessible, and long galleries which lead to nothing. Festeons of Indian corn, hang with golden and ruddy fringe from the prominent eaves; still deeper in the shadow of the roof, are rude shelves, on which is drying the oily produce of the two neighbouring walnut-trees, which those long slender poles are supposed to have thrashed into proper bearing.

What picturesque confusion in yonder angle of the building—rude implements of husbandry—the light "char," with the yoke and harness for oxen; and under an indescribable mass the winter's sledge, awaiting its coming time of usefulness. In the foreground is that heap of abomination, so valued that its sides are adorned with plaited straw, and a stone reservoir contains its dark filtration—facetiously called the "dot," or dowry, for, however fair the maiden at the chalet door may be, the young Swiss "about to marry," has always an eye to this strong indicator of the quantity of live stock, and proof of the owner's thrift and prosperity.

* * * *

After another hour's ascent we occasionally caught sight of the Chalet Desesert through the drifting clouds which had come up from the North. Then, entirely enveloped in the chilling mist, with no other guide than the imprint of the cattle's feet on the sward, we reached our destined point. The hail fell sharply as we entered. After a few words of welcome from the principal herdsman, we were attracted by the noise and confusion to the large cow-shed beyond. Imagine the interior of an enormous barn, capable of containing a hundred head of cattle, with a high-pointed roof; at either end a small low door through which one animal only can enter at a time. The hail-storm increasing, rattling with violence on the great scantling roof; the cattle

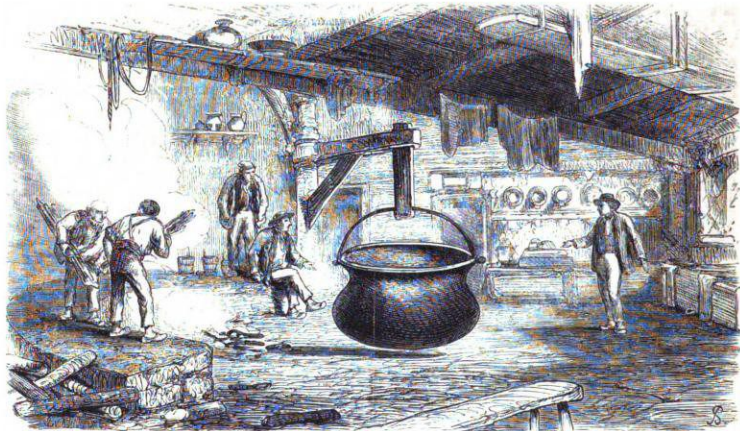
driven hurriedly from the pasturage and forcing their way, one by one, through the narrow entrances; the herdsmen beyond gesticulating and shouting in the pelting storm; the noise and confusion increased by the jingling of the large cow-bells and the lowing of the cattle. Observe how each animal as it enters, goes directly to its place—"knoweth its own stall," until the two long ranks are completely formed down the sides of the cow-shed. Then the doors are closed, and comparative silence succeeds—save that the hail still beats violently on the high roof, and occasionally some restless animal shakes his bell, and receives a loud reproof from the herdsmen in incomprehensible *patois*. As soon as the cattle have sufficiently cooled, and the thick mist which has risen from their reeking sides has passed through the roof, the herdsmen, ludicrously enough, armed with their one-legged stools, commence the process of milking, giving to each animal a handful of salt, as a security for quiet behaviour during the operation.

Contiguous are the buildings appropriated to the making of cheese and the habitations of the herdsmen; they are low, ill-ventilated—little better than log-huts—constructed of trunks of pine, and the crevices plastered with mud. In the interior of the principal hut hangs the large caldron, into which the freshly-drawn milk is poured. The crane from which it is suspended will swing it over the "foyer," so soon as the smoke from the fire of crackling fir has subsided and left the embers bright and glowing. On the walls, blackened with smoke, are hung the pails and other apparatus of the dairy; their perfect state of cleanliness contrasting strongly with the dirt around them. Beneath are the troughs and presses for the cheese. But the milking is finished; the lowing of the cattle round the chalet tells that the animals are again at liberty. The contents of the milking-pails have been poured into the caldron, and the herdsmen gather round the foyer, enjoying in listless silence the warmth and momentary repose. They have little opportunity of indulging that Arcadian leisure which romance and the opera ballet assign to the Swiss mountaineers. The driving home of so many cattle, twice a day, to be milked; the responsibility of keeping them from danger or straying on the mountains; the making of the cheese; the cleaning and arrangement of the dairy utensils, give them constant and arduous occupation.

A bed of straw is their resting-place during the short summer nights. Their food consists almost entirely of milk and cheese; consequently they are pale and delicate—"dairy-fed"—seldom tasting bread during their annual sojourn on the mountains. They usually ascend with their cattle in the beginning of June, and descend to the valley at the end of October. The quantity of cheese made during this time is very considerable. This may be calculated from the number of cows, seldom less than eighty. The best cows will yield in the summer-time between twenty and forty pounds of milk, and each cow produces (on an average) by the end of the four months, two hundred weight of cheese. Twice a year each cow is tried separately as to the amount of cheese which

she is capable of producing in a given time. The proportion indicated by this trial regulates the division of the cheese among the owners at the conclusion of the season.

After a slight repast, rendered still more frugal by our giving the white bread from our knapsacks as a *bonne bouche* to the herdsmen (clouted-cream and a cigar being very questionable restora-



tives to hungry pedestrians), we prepared to depart homewards.

Turning towards the door of the *châlet*, we beheld the upper-part of the half-closed entrance occupied by the head and shoulders of an enormous bull, the patriarch of the herd. It was his favourite station where he ruminated and watched the proceedings within the *châlet*. By the palette of Paul Potter, and the pencil of Rosa Bonheur, the head of that formidable beast was a noble study. He was no sleek, well-groomed prize bull of the Baker Street type; but rough-coated and half-tamed, of the antique cast, with a broad, classical, and curly forehead, and horns which should have been gilded for the sacrifice. The breath of his nostrils, condensed by the cold mountain air, bedewed his broad black muzzle, while the lustre and softness of his large eyes made me think that old Homer did not pay the goddesses so bad a compliment after all, by comparing their heavenly eyes to those of the bovine race. We blush to say that, in our childhood, bull's eyes had a mysterious charm, but in a very vulgar and different sense.

Maurice was the name given by the herdsmen to this majestic quadruped—it ought to have been Jupiter.

He bore a tolerably good character with his masters, but certainly was capricious. A handful of salt made us apparent friends; and as he had deigned to receive this token of good-will among travellers, we passed out with less apprehension. He immediately followed us, and an unworthy distrust of his intentions caused us to walk straight through the slough of poached earth and filth which surrounds the *châlet*. We were not sorry

when Maurice, finding that we had no more salt to give him, stopped, and quietly watched us off his premises. My companion had many anecdotes to tell of the ferocity of these Jura bulls.

The hail-storm had passed away, and there was the promise of a lovely afternoon. How wild and graceful was the rapid motion of those masses of vapour along the mountain side, dashing with noiseless violence against the high crags, seeming to soften their hard nature by the momentary contact; sweeping over the lofty pines, or making an easy passage through all the intricacies of their countless stems, then passing away over the valley and casting their shadows so far beneath as to give to our position the feeling of immense elevation. The view was a most magnificent panorama. On the right of the plain was the Lake of Geneva, and at the opposite extremity that of Neuchâtel; beyond rose the well-known form of Mont Blanc, and the other mountains of Savoy, and those faint forms, which might be mistaken for clouds, in the far east, are the snowy range of the Oberland.

As we descended, we did not take the same road as that of the morning, and consequently came through villages and communes of a different character, much more French in their aspect. Half-way down the mountain we passed through a small bourg, inhabited by an intelligent and thriving population, employed in the manufacture of watches, many of which, it is said, are smuggled over the neighbouring French frontier. A short time since, the Paris diligence from Lausanne was overturned in this vicinity; the pole, being broken, was found to be a hollow tube in which a

large number of watches were ingeniously concealed.

The town of Orbe, to which we must return before night, was still distant in the valley, so that we were compelled to hurry down the mountain. I passed with regret many a rich subject for the pencil, reluctantly keeping the high-road above the Val d'Orbe instead of winding down the rocky defile through which the river forces its passage. We heard beneath us the roar of the Chûte des Dés, seeing only the grey mist which rose from its falling waters among the underwood. Further on we could see into the bed of the torrent, here fretting its way in bright cascades among the grey boulders, there lying in unrippled pools, reflecting the overhanging woods. But the day is wearing on, and my companion is urging me forward in the direction of that square tower which commands the narrow defile. It is well named—Les Clefs—having been, in troublous times, "the key" of the pass. We descend the steep hill-side by a tortuous road, at one angle blocked up by a "char" and four oxen, conveying with difficulty a large cast-iron wheel and other machinery to the mills below. We pass through the village, nestled under the shadow and protection of the old tower, cross the high-arched bridge with the ruined portal, and in the gorge below are situated The Mills, built in a most perilous and picturesque situation, with the intention of turning to industrial profit the waters of the rushing Orbe, but with the evident apprehension of the violence and caprice of an Alpine torrent. I regretted that the daylight was departing when I began my sketch, for in these days of mechanical improvement a picturesque mill is a treat for the sketcher. Indeed there was subject enough for many studies in those high-gabled roofs, and all the varieties of colour and construction, and the long sloping troughs of wood, with bright hissing jets forced through their decaying timbers, giving to the water a resistless action upon the massive wheels. Beneath, the river roars through narrow walls of rock, and bearing on its swift surface the accumulated foam of the Chûte des Dés and other falls which we had passed, plunges into the deep gully beneath the mill, undermining the rocks of porous stone, and wearing them away into most fantastic forms.

My sketch of these picturesque mills was hardly finished when the distant crags of the Jura became more grey in the increasing twilight. There is a change in the voice of the torrent, for the miller has given liberty to the water, and it leaps impatiently back into its natural channel; the sudden stoppage of the dark wheels increases the feeling of repose. "The twinkling taper" of the miller, as he closes the rude shutters, is reflected for a moment on the swift waters below. We are admonished that it is time to take our departure to scenes where we can tread in more security. The shades of night are deepening fast in the narrow gorge, and in the solemn gloom we step cautiously over the plank which spans the gulf, and then direct our steps towards the town of Orbe.

PERCIVAL SKELTON.

THE GENTLEMAN IN THE PLUM-COLOURED COAT.

CHAPTER I.

My aunt was the centre of an aureole of good report. She was rumoured to be rich. I was strenuously bidden never to forget this fact, and to be accordingly unremitting in my attention to her. "A widow and without a family," exclaimed all my well-wishers; "what is she to do with her money if she does not leave it to her most respectful and respectable of nephews?"

My aunt resided in a quarter of the town which was fashionable about say a century ago;—for Fashion is a vagrant deity, enjoying the rites of her altars not as freeholds in perpetuity, but on leasehold tenures for very short terms of years. Commerce and Poverty are the bailiffs that ceaselessly dog her footsteps, distract upon her chattels, and eject her from her possessions. Yet the

neighbourhood in which my aunt abode, though Fashion had long since wandered miles away from it in pursuit of that aristocratic *ignis fatuus* called exclusiveness, had not suffered deeply in its respectability. The knockers, it is true, no longer trembled beneath the wrought-up energies of radiant footmen; the rumble of coronetted chariots, the shouts of loud-lunged linkmen no longer roused the echoes of the streets, but Trade as yet held aloof—a Damocles sword hanging over the doomed district. Shops had not yet commenced to disturb façades and abolish parlours. The symptoms of fall were unmistakable. The professions had made large inroads on the place. Law and medicine had firmly fixed themselves. Art had been cutting up the first-floor windows. Charity and science were converting the larger mansions into hospitals and institutions. But the Deluge had not yet come. My aunt was secure in the respectability and repose of Abigail Place, Maaham Square, in the W.C. district of the Post Office.

Next=>



When I mention repose, I would have the word understood in a qualified way. For though the vested interests of a century were respected, and the inhabitants were still at liberty to maintain posts, chains, and gates to ward off the profane vulgar, prevent the desecrating influence of cabs and carts, and generally establish as many obstacles and inconveniences to public comfort as was any way practicable—for though “No thoroughfare” was inscribed in every direction, till the streets got quit rusty and mildewed from want of use, and fringes of dank grass bedecked the paving-stones—for though a beadle was instituted and salaried for the proper preservation of order and quiet—still the repose of the place was subject to severe and degrading invasion. For alas! the beadle!—how changed from that beadle formerly governing the quietude of Abigail Place, Masham Square!—was a little withered old man in a faded uniform, off which the gold trimmings had melted like the glories of yesterday's sunset. The coat he was doomed to wear had evidently in its first construction been planned for a much larger person. He was poor and feeble, quite incapable of the martial air and over-swelling dignity proper to the British beadle. He suffered from cold in the head, both chronic and acute in its attacks, and in defiance of all regulation proprieties would insist on disfiguring his uniform by sweetering his chin and neck in a long and many-hued comforter terminating in worsted balls that swayed and bobbed about before him like parti-colored pippins in a high wind. The former beadle's massive staff of office which seemed to have effervesced and burst out at the top in a large brazen bubble, had degenerated in the hands of the existing functionary into a simple bamboo, price one halfpenny. Could such a man so armed hope to make head against the army of boys that resorted to Abigail Place for “fly the garter,” “hop-scotch,” and “three-hole” purposes? Was he not rather a byeword and a reproach amongst those intrepid juvenilities? Could he turn the assaults of grinning, white-teethed, olive-faced organ-men with performing monkeys, depressing comic singers, and “la perche” and “globe rou-

lant” acrobats in faded fleshings? It was not to be expected of him. He acquiesced in his destiny. He let the peace of Abigail Place take care of itself. If inwardly he lamented the decadence of his official functions, he outwardly betrayed no emotion save a lively appreciation of the Prince of Orange public-house, and the joys to be there purchased at economical cost.

My aunt lived in the old bow-windowed house, No. 6, in Abigail Place.

She was an elderly lady, tall and thin, with large gaunt features and light grey eyes, stony and staring in effect. Something of a yellow tone prevailed in her general aspect from her pale sallow complexion and her persistence in wearing, no matter the season of the year, an Indian shawl of a tawny saffron colour. Her long thin hands were always clothed with black lace mittens, through the interstices of which various jewelled rings sparkled hazily. Stiff ringlets of a dead black hue were coiled upon each side of her forehead, and confined in a manner that fostered suspicion as to their genuineness by a black velvet band from which a large garnet set in dull gold dangled on her forehead. My aunt's occupations were few. She seldom stirred out of the house, but generally sat all the day through on a large sofa by the fire in her front parlour, with her tawny mantle on her shoulders, her jewel on her forehead—a strange combination of the turban and the nightcap on her head—employed in knitting with her thin black mittened-hands, and with wooden needles of vast calibre, very strong and coarse comforters, the wool-ball in an enclosed basket at her feet, rolling and leaping about as the work required it, unwinding like a desperately active rat in a wire cage. Occasionally, too, she executed another species of work which rendered it necessary that she should insert her foot in a stirrup and go bowing and jogging on as though she were engaged in equestrian exercise of a prolonged and energetic character. The destination of my aunt's work no one ever knew. As soon as one comforter was completed another was commenced, and by a curious inconsistency, the hotter the weather the more zealously my aunt seemed to employ herself in the manufacture of extra strong and thick comforters. Occasionally she left her seat to move to the window, and negative by severe shakings of her head the petitions of pertinacious beggars or obstinate organ-men. And now and then she indulged herself in a promenade up and down her small sitting-room, always walking very upright and joining her hands behind her in quite a quarter-deck commanding officer sort of way. But her love of exercise was not strong, and she was more frequently to be found sitting on the sofa by the fire, knitting to the musical purring of a fat black and white cat with a pink nose, the very feline incarnation of luxurious content and selfish enjoyment.

My aunt had a favourite and confidential servant named Willis, who had lived with her for about thirty years; and, probably from this cause and from being invested and attired in many articles weeded from my aunt's wardrobe, had acquired no inconsiderable resemblance to her. She was some years younger and stouter, and

more active; but she also wore hair of dense blackness, fastened on her forehead, though unbound by a jewelled fillet. She also assumed at times much of my aunt's rigid and severe expression; wore on her head a fabric of wire and muslin, in which some type of Orientalism was traceable, and which she called a "turbot," and rejoiced in black mittens on her hands, though of a less open and heavier material. Her respect for my aunt amounted to veneration. Her care and attention were unremitting; and my aunt rewarded the fidelity of her companion by admitting her to closer terms of intimacy and friendship than are usual between mistress and servant. Her regard for my aunt Willis also, though in a less degree, extended to her relatives. I know that I often received at her hands an amount of homage that was almost embarrassing.

It was a peculiarity shared by my aunt and Willis to clothe me with a youthfulness which was really inappropriate. My aunt invariably addressed me as "child," and Willis always preferred to give me the prefix of "master" in lieu of the more mature "mister," to which my years very fairly entitled me.

"Willis, take the child's hat," said my aunt, whenever I called to pay my respects and inquire after her health. She never rose from her seat, but always nodded her head in a severely kind way, and held out a thin cold finger for me to shake.

"I hope you're quite well, Master —?" inquired Willis, in a friendly, patronising way. It was wonderful with what a schoolboy feeling I became possessed. It always seemed as likely as not that they would on some occasion invite me to spin a top, or would produce a rocking-horse for my delectation, or promise me a feast of sugared bread-and-butter if I would recite, without missing a word, "The Boy stood on the burning deck," or "My name is Norval." I know my aunt maintained a habit of furtively "tipping" me with bright silver coins long after I was eight-and-twenty years of age.

"How you *do* grow, Master —," Willis would go on, goodnaturedly; "quite out of all knowledge."

If she meant old, she was tolerably correct, but if, as I believe, she alluded to my height, it was a singular observation, since for many a long day no inch had been added to my stature.

I generally called upon my aunt in the evening.

Our conversation was not very well sustained. It seldom comprised more than a discussion on the weather, my aunt always maintaining that the seasons had quite changed since she was my age, with occasional digressions as to the progress of my aunt's knitting achievements, and the state of health of the black-and-white cat with the pink nose. At eight o'clock my aunt always put away her work, folded her hands before her, placed her feet upon the fender,—she had a fire nearly all the year round,—and sat quite still for nearly half an hour. She was not asleep; but she kept her eyes fixed on the clock over the mantelpiece. I remember that dial well; it was a curious piece of French ingenuity that did not keep very correct time, and represented the figure of a

harlequin in a loose patchwork suit and black mask carrying on his back a large drum, the side of which formed the face of the clock. It was hemmed in by a variety of grotesque china ornaments, terminating at either end of the shelf in a green dog in a gold collar,—an animal of unnatural and surpassing hideousness. My aunt watched the clock until it chirped the half-hour: she then rang the bell.

"Tea, Willis."

Soon after Willis entered with a large urn, something of the funeral form seen in cemeteries, and with large rings at the side by which to carry it: it only wanted a weeping willow over it to complete an admirable sign for a mourning shop. The teapot was a large china vessel, with a remarkable sort of basket suspended from its spout for filtering purposes. My aunt poured hot water into the pot with great solemnity. I know I always,—I suppose for want of better occupation,—watched the operation with considerable interest. I counted the number of spoonfuls of tea put into the pot: one for my aunt, I thought,—one for me,—one for the pot,—and one—who was the fourth for? I always wondered, for she always put four in; and then I always noticed that three cups had been brought up;—two of a neat ordinary pattern for my aunt and myself, and a third of much more elaborate design, richly gilded, and pictured over with glowing rosebuds and festoons of green vine-leaves and golden grapes. Who was this cup for? The process of brewing the tea was one of some duration. My aunt turned her eyes to the clock at every pause in the proceeding. It was nine o'clock by the time the tea was ready for outpouring. As the clock struck my aunt rang the bell again.

"Well, Willis?" my aunt said, inquiringly: Willis wore a vague mysterious look.

"It's nine and past," she said.

"Yes!" My aunt heaved a deep sigh.

"He'll hardly be here now," Willis continued.

"No." My aunt looked very sad indeed. Willis shook her head strangely and solemnly.

"He must know by this time," said my aunt.

"Of course he does," Willis answered, "unless—"

"Unless what?" My aunt looked up eagerly.

"Unless he's gone to the north-east." Willis spoke in a low voice.

"Or to the south-east." My aunt bowed her head in a mournful way.

"Ay, or to the north-west," Willis went on.

"Or to the south-west." My aunt hid her face in her handkerchief. The minute-hand on the harlequin's drum was stealing on to the quarter-past. My aunt roused herself.

"I should never forgive myself, if he were to come and find us unprepared for him."

Willis seemed to think the consequences of such a contingency would be utterly terrible.

"You had better go to the corner, Willis, and look out."

"Certainly."

And Willis left the room, and I could hear her go out into the street. My aunt did not speak or move, or take the slightest notice of my presence: she kept her gaze fixed to the clock. In a few

minutes Willis returned. My aunt turned towards her anxiously; but the expression on Willis's countenance seemed to be a sufficient answer.

"He'll not come now," said my aunt.

"I think not."

"And the night's fine?"

"Very fine."

"Not too cold?"

"No, not too cold."

"I'm glad of that. Thank you, Willis: that will do, Willis. Put coal on, Willis. Elder wine at ten o'clock, Willis."

And then my aunt poured out the tea.

What did this mean?

The same formula went on each time I paid my evening visit to my aunt. The same interchange of looks and words; the same question and reply; the same doubts about the north and south-east, the north and south-west; the same going out into the street; the same gazing at the clock; the same return alone of Willis, and observations upon the weather. What did it all mean? This was my aunt's mystery. In vain I sought some explanation of the enigma; in vain I tried to dissipate the clouds about it by some reasonable solution; in vain I put the case to my friends, and besought their views in regard to it. I was only recommended to boldly inquire of my aunt. I was a long time before I could make up my mind to adopt this course. At length human patience could survive it no longer.

"Whom do you expect, aunt?" I boldly broke out with one evening, after a more than usually provoking performance of the mystery.

"Hush, Master——" cried Willis, with a frightened gesture.

"Children shouldn't ask questions," said my aunt grimly, and with a petrified look about her eyes. She was seriously offended: she did not speak to me again that evening. At ten o'clock she took her usual refreshment of a glass of hot ink-looking elder wine, and a stick of dry toast, and then was led away to bed by Willis.

I never dared to repeat the inquiry. People said my aunt was mad,— "had a loose alate," was the expression; and satisfied themselves with that explanation, but it never satisfied me. That some fixed notion absorbed her, that her whole faculties were concentrated upon one particular idea seemed likely. Yet this, "though it lacked form a little, was not like madness."

II.

To reach the root of an old tree one must dig down very deep.

To arrive at the commencement of my aunt's mystery, I have to turn back a good many pages of Time's chronicles.

I have to revert to days when those extinct marvels called Tory gentlemen, over deep glasses of fiery Port, held "Boney" in stinging derision; when an elderly prince, complacently *débonnaire*, with a strong feeling for auburn wigs and massive, balustrade-like calves, swayed the destiny of Britain as deputy for a more elderly king, whom mental embarrassment had constrained to retire from the business; when Lawrence was painting glittering-eyed, carmine-lipped, satin-skinned wo-

men; when Canova was chiselling florescent compromises between the antique nymph and the modern flirt; when Byron was dropping at intervals his red-hot shells of poems upon amazed London.

It is not with London that I have to deal, however: but with the classic city founded by Bladud, Son of Lud Hudibras, Eighth King of the Britons,—with Bath, of hot-spring and pump-room fame, shining fair and clean amid its hills, like a lump of white sugar in a green cup.

There is quite a blazing forest of wax-candles in the Assembly Room, rapidly filling with a most distinguished company. The clatter of dance-music rings through the elegant *salon*, making the very glass beads of the chandeliers jump and click themselves together. The master of the ceremonies is in the extremest agonies of his office. He shuffles and deals out the company like a conjuror with his cards, never once losing sight of the more eligible or trumps, and winning all sorts of odd tricks by his adroitness and sleight of hand.

I desire to point out a young lady making her *début* at this ball. She is tall and slight, not ungraceful. She is not beautiful, but attractive from her amiable, subdued, rather shy expression. Her attire is in the mode of the day; the dress scanty in quantity, and peculiar in form,—"gored," I believe to be the correct term for the breadths of a dress cut narrower at the top than at the bottom of the skirt. Globular puffs of muslin form the sleeves of the frock, and white kid gloves, almost as long as stockings, enclose her arms. She carries a very small fan, and wears a short waist, girded by a bright-coloured sash, tied in a bow at the back, and flowing off into streamers, like a duplex blue-peter floating from the fore. Her head appears to be regarded rather as a foundation for further height, than as the capital of the human figure. There is quite a square half-foot of tortoiseshell erected on her crown, and from this arise elaborate plaits of hair, bunches of ribbon, and garlands of very small daisies. Cataracts of small crisp curls gush on to her temples: long gold drope depend from her ears and strings of coral beads set off the white of her neck. The dress is short enough to display amply very neat feet and ankles, in open-work net stockings and white satin sandals ingeniously tied with many cross-foldings. The effect of such a costume in a modern ball-room would be, perhaps, a little startling: at the period I refer to it was most modestly *en règle*.

She was timid and shy: it was her first ball. From a quiet country-house in the most retired part of Somersetshire she had been transplanted into the festive city of Bath, and she found the air a little overcharged and feverish, a little over-scented with pomade, a little deficient in freshness altogether. And a great difficulty was startling her mind as it was disturbing the discriminations of very many respectable people in those days—for it was a serious, earnest, vital question; accordingly as the young lady made answer was her fate to be decided, she was to be either banned as a prude, or launched as a coquette. And this was the question. *Was walking proper?* There was no escape from giving a reply. The thing must be

classified under one or other of those very English divisions,—it was “proper,” or it was “shocking!”

The young lady was much moved by this question. She had fairly walked into the Rubicon, but could not make up her mind whether she should cross over or walk back again. She had learnt the step, but then she had only performed

the dance with other young ladies fair, shy, and trembling like herself. She had not yet yielded her waist to the arm of the male waltzer. Should she now submit? The question could be no longer begged, for the stupendous master of the ceremonies was approaching and leading towards her a gentleman, evidently a dancer, and the orchestra had struck up that defunct air “Lieber Augustin,” one of the first waltzes imported. I shall not attempt to describe further the master of the ceremonies; for though but a dim representative of that renowned Beau Nash whose sceptre he swayed, I feel that so great a subject cannot fittingly be treated episodically. I turn therefore to the gentleman who is being pioneered so dexterously through the crowded throngs of the ball-room.

It was rather a transitional period. “The blood,” was dying out—the fighting, strong, swaggering, hard-headed, muscular blood was fairly going out of fashion. “The swell” was not born or thought of, being entirely of a nobility of recent creation. There were the interim stages of the “buck” and the “dandy.” Effeminacy was the vogue, inanity the ruling mode. Gentlemen boasted of their weak nerves, interchanged rapid Brummelisms, padded their limbs and shoulders, plastered curls on their foreheads, even to their eyebrows, splashed about *Eau de Cologne* to keep off the odour of “low people,” wore stays, and bragged as having done a daring coarse thing, that they “had once eat a pea!” The man of fashion of that day was not altogether a thing to be very highly respected.

The gentleman in the care of the master of the ceremonies was an average specimen of his class. He was as good-looking, according to the modern views, as his costume would permit him to be. “Knees and silks” were becoming the peculiar properties of the professions and of old gentlemen. Pantaloon was the intermediate step to the

trousers of to-day. Necks were worn long and muslined and buckramed to a point that seemed to put life in peril. The bow of the neck-tie was a thing on which to stake a reputation—to accomplish, and then die. Waists were short, and heavy watch-chains hung from the fob-pockets, weighted with bunches of massive seals and keys. Pumps were the fashion, with ribbed silk stockings. A luxuriant foliage of frilling flourished upon the bosom, and violet-hued waistcoats were worn with false collars of supposititious other waistcoats appearing above the genuine. The gentleman I am referring to wore a bright green silk “vest,” crowned by a collar of red and then a collar of white. His coat was long, narrow, and pointed at the tails,—very tight in its sleeves, very

rolling in its collar—very much puffed up on the shoulders. It was decorated with gilt basket-buttons, and its colour was plum—a vivid and fruity plum.

The lady, speechless and trembling, hardly knowing what she did, yielded to the entreaties of the master of the ceremonies—to the polite application of the gentleman. In a sort of unconscious way she stood up to join in the dance. The gentleman appreciating her trouble and diffidence, considerably zoned her waist with his arm in a firm decided manner, and they started off on their revolving exploit. They succeeded, for they were both excellent dancers. The room paused to witness their wonderful circling career. There was a loud buzz of “admirable!” Only a few severe ladies, with strong prejudices in



favour of the "Gavotte," "Sir Roger," and "The Tank" growled out lowly, but intensely, "Shocking!" The master of the ceremonies condescended to congratulate the dancers on their triumph. Such a thing was almost without precedent.

Between the lady and the gentleman, however, little conversation passed, for dancing and talking are not altogether compatible. Once he asked her if she would take some nogs; once he admired her fan; once he inquired if she didn't think the room hot; and when they parted for the evening he muttered an incomplete sentence, something about his regret that an acquaintance so delightfully begun should cease so suddenly, and that if the devotion of a life—; but here a lurch in the crush-room snapped the sense of the observation, and parted the lady and gentleman. He jerked out, "Too-bad, 'pon honor!" put his quizzing-glass to his eye, and went to look out for some more supper,—for romance only defers, it does not satiate the appetite.

The lady went home, and in due time sunk back into her retired country life. She always thought of her evening in the Bath ball-room, as one of the most important events in her life; she often dreamt of her partner the gentleman in the plum-coloured coat; she was never tired of talking of him. Often she dwelt upon the delights of her first waltz; often she looked in subsequent ball-rooms for that exquisite partner in the plum-coloured coat. She made all sorts of inquiries about him; sought to ascertain his name—his place of abode—but not successfully. She was unable to fix upon him any more definite title than that of the gentleman in the plum-coloured coat.

After a lapse of some years the young lady was sought in marriage, and duly led to the altar by a gentleman returned from the East Indies with the reputation of being "a nabob." Her heart was not greatly in the business; but with that of course nobody had anything to do. The nabob was not of a very amiable disposition, and did not treat his wife too tenderly; he was a violent, turgid, cruel man, with no thought but for himself. The kindest action he ever performed towards his poor frightened wife was when, thirty-five years after his marriage, he made her his widow, and was interred with extraordinary pomp in the vaults of Marylebone Church.

The widow bore her bereavement like King Claudius, "with wisest sorrow;" she sold off a great deal of her large cumbrous furniture, and with the rest, and a faithful old servant who had been with her almost from her marriage, and who, as the reader will have inferred, bore the name of Willis, settled down in a quiet and respectable street known as Abigail Place, Masham Square, W.C.

III.

ONE day I had seen the formula of the mystery for the last time. My poor old aunt, in a quiet, painless illness, had passed away. Willis was in very great distress.

"Ah! Master —, she was the kindest, truest, goodest mistress that ever was." Willis sobbed

piteously. "I shall never find such another; never—never! Poor soul, it's a comfort to think that she didn't want for nothing. It's a consolation to reflect on, that is. Her wants weren't many, but she had them all supplied."

A thought occurred to me.

"Not all," I said.

Willis looked up inquiringly through her tears.

"He didn't come."

Willis started, and turned quite pale.

"O Master —, how did you know anything about it?"

"I know all," I said.

It was a shameful artifice. I assumed a mysterious, solemn, and meaning air that quite imposed upon Willis, and led her on to forgetting her sorrows in conversation. Gradually the narrative of the Bath ball-room came from her. On the particulars gathered from Willis I have founded that portion of my story. As the reader has no doubt conjectured, the lady who waltzed with the gentleman in the plum-coloured coat was my aunt.

"Ah, Master —," Willis went on shaking her head to and fro, pathetically, "my poor mistress had a sad time of it. Her late husband was a hard, hard man. He'd been accustomed to such slave-driving ways in the Indies, he couldn't treat a simple English lady properly. My poor Mistress was often very sad and wretched about him, and sat alone, and thought and cried over her young days and how quiet and happy they were, and often she talked of the ball at Bath, and her dancing, and her partner there. And then five years after my master died she had a long, long illness, and her head was a good bit troubled; and when she recovered, which wasn't for ever so long, she got to rambling back to her young times more than ever, and her memory was touched like, and she could only recollect the things which happened quite far back. Then she would be always talking of the Bath gentleman, and she got it fixed in her mind that she should meet him again even yet; and that now she was free again, he would make her an offer of his hand, in pledge of the devotion of a life, and they would be married and happy at last. She got to be for ever talking of this, and wanting to make fresh inquiries, and try and find him out. At last old Mrs. Luff came here one day to do some charring work, and she was full of a wise-woman living next door to her in Brooker's Buildings.

"A what?"

"A wise-woman—a good woman some calls them—who knew everything, could do all sorts of conjuring tricks, tell you all you'd done, bless you, in the whole course of your life, and predict the future by looking in teacups and spreading out packs of cards. Well my mistress heard of this, and at last made up her mind to see the woman and try if she could tell where the gentleman was to be found. Well they had long consultations, and my mistress gave the woman all sorts of things to work the spells with as she called it;—now it was cold meat, now it was gowns, now stout, now bonnets, and now it was one of every coin of the realm, to be left on the door-step at the full moon and to be gone by the morning—took by

the spirits, she said. Well, at last she gave her prediction.—It was about time, for it had cost ever so much money. She said that my mistress and the gentleman would be sure to meet again, and would be happy; that the gentleman was travelling, but the stars wouldn't quite tell her where; that he must be written to, and that as it stood to reason he must be either in the north, south, east, or west, four letters must be sent so addressed, and one would be sure to reach him."

"And my aunt wrote?"

"Yes, Master —; she wrote four letters: they were all alike. She kept a copy of what she wrote; I know where to find it—I'll show it to you."

She produced a sheet of note-paper, written upon in my aunt's cramped irregular writing. The letter ran thus:—

DEAR SIR,—Many years ago you may remember meeting the present writer at a ball at Bath. I wore a lace frock over white silk, with a blue sash. You were dressed in a green waistcoat and a plum-coloured coat. I have been married, but my husband is dead, and I am now free again. Pray come and see me. There is nothing now to prevent our union.

Your affectionate,

SARAH ARABELLA.

P.S.—I address this from the house with the bow-window. Recollect this, please, as there are four number sixes.

There was no date, nor was the address given, and my aunt had apparently only signed her christian names.

"How were the letters directed?"

"Simply 'To the Gentleman in the Plum-coloured Coat, North, South, East, West.'"

"Well?"

"Well, we were to post the letters at the most distant London post-offices we could find. My mistress hired a fly and went round posting her letters. One was put in at Camberwell, one at Islington, one at Kensington, and one in White-chapel. The wise-woman was told of this, and said we had done quite right. My mistress then gave her her sable boa and muff, and she then predicted that the gentleman would arrive in a very few days, and that he would appear precisely at teatime, at nine o'clock."

"He didn't come?"

"He didn't, indeed, Master —! But my mistress was always expecting him. When after a few weeks she got tired a little, she sent again to the wise-woman to try and learn more about him. But the woman had left the neighbourhood suddenly, and we couldn't find out where she had moved to. Then we had a great talking over of the matter, and my mistress wouldn't give up that he would come yet, but was only frightened about his having gone to the north-east or north-west, or to the south-east or south-west, and so not got the letters. So she expected him, and made tea for him, and waited, and sent me out to look for him every night, poor thing, right up to her death last Tuesday."

"And did you expect him, Willis?"

"Well, Master —! what with the wise-woman and my mistress and the incessant talking about

him and the perpetual wondering whether and when he'd come, I got to think of it at last as all true and likely, and to actually believe that he would come. Ah! it's a sad business to think that she should have died and not seen him again after all! Poor soul! poor soul!"

And Willis gave way again to her tears.

My aunt's mystery was explained.

Her mind, never very strong, in the last year of her life still further weakened by wear, and shattered and crazed by grief and illness, had strayed back to the one happy passage in her rather dull and doleful life, and clung to it with a tenacity which only death could relax. The desire to meet again her first waltz partner had swelled and ripened into a confirmed monomania.

I never read in the newspapers of a fortune-teller taken up for swindling but I think of the wise-woman who preyed upon my aunt, and trust that the worthy magistrate will deal out the law with the utmost rigour. I never see a stout old gentleman, curly in wig and hat-rim, tight in his girths, and with a general savour of the Regency buck about him, decking the window of a St. James's Street club, or taking very cautious promenades in Pall Mall, but I ask myself whether it is possible he could have been the gentleman who wore the plum-coloured coat and waltzed with my aunt at the Bath ball in 18—.

I may mention that my aunt's wealth had been the subject of a grievous exaggeration. The nabob had played highly, and at his death left his widow little more than a comfortable annuity, which died with her. Of her savings, however, there was enough to secure a small pension for the faithful Willis. All that I received—at any rate, all that I now possess—of my aunt's property is comprised in my chimney-decorations: the French harlequin with the drum-clock and the hideous green china dogs. DUTTON COOK.

A RAILROAD JOURNEY.



"WILL you mind having the window up, old fellow?" said I to Charley Howard, one foggy afternoon as we were travelling down to Scotland together, "it is a precious raw day this same twenty-ninth of February."

"Twenty-ninth of February!" repeated Charley, like a parrot, pausing with the window half up in his hand, "is it possible?"

"Possible, albeit improbable, I admit, seeing it comes but once in four years. But what on earth is the matter with you, Charley? It is Leap-year certainly, but what of that, unless you have been trifling with the affections of some fair damsel who will pursue you to make you an offer, which she is entitled to do this year! Is she after you? By Jove! I believe you are afraid she will come after you here."

"Fred," said Charley, in a subdued, quiet way very unlike himself, for he is a noisy fellow is Charley, six foot high, and always in the open air. I believe he thinks a house need only consist of a bed-room and dining-hall, with perhaps a lean-to for a billiard-table on a wet day. "You know I am not a fellow to take nervous fancies into my head; don't laugh now, if I tell you a very strange thing that happened to me on this very line, four years ago this very day."

"You nervous! well I should not have thought it certainly, although I wish my best ties were ever as white as your blessed face is at this very moment. Go ahead, Charley! but let me light my cigar to keep my spirits up; nothing like a story for sending a man to sleep—particularly yours"—which last utterance was sotto voce.

"Four years ago, to-day," began Charley, in such a solemn tone. Upon my life! I felt rather inclined to kick the fellow for making me feel drowsy before my time. "Four years ago, I was travelling on this very line—"

"You told me that before," said I; "get on—do!"

"—and, as I wanted to have a quiet smoke—"

"No harm in that," said I, approvingly; "a thing I am not averse to myself."

"—I bribed the guard to lock me in a carriage by myself—"

"Your foresight was good," said I again, "though tampering with the company's servants is forbidden."

"I had performed about half the journey in much comfort," resumed Charley, "when the train stopped at a junction station about five o'clock in the afternoon. There was a good deal of crowd on the platform, and, secure in the purchase I had made of the guard's promise, I amused myself by watching the people elbowing and pushing each other about. There was one figure, however, which attracted my attention by the contrast it formed to the rest. It was a lady, wrapped in a long white bournous, which looked cold and chilly that foggy afternoon."

"Possibly her dressing-gown," said I; "an ill-judged costume, certainly."

"She was apparently young, for the tall figure was very slender; but she had so thick a veil on her face I could not distinguish the features. She alone seemed to know neither bustle nor hurry;

she moved slowly along, with a sort of undulating motion, and with the utmost unconcern walked up and down until the bell had rung, and the train was just starting, when, to my surprise, she stopped opposite my carriage, gently opened the door, and placed herself on the opposite side to me. "Hang the fellow!" said I to myself, "I thought he told me the door was locked." But there was no time for remonstrance then, for the train had started. She sat quite still with her veil down, and I began to wish very much to see her face."

"Very pardonable, as you thought she was young," muttered I.

"There was a long bright curl hanging from beneath the veil which took my fancy very much—"

"I should have taken the curl, I think," said I.

"—So, to begin a conversation, I said I was afraid she might find the carriage smell of smoke. As I spoke, she turned her head towards me. 'I am afraid, then, sir,' she said, 'that I am a most unwelcome intruder in your carriage, for I must have interfered with your smoking.' As she spoke, she lifted the thick veil, and—upon my life, Fred, I never saw so beautiful a face. It was a perfect oval, with beautiful soft brown eyes, very delicately traced eyebrows above them, and long lashes that rested on her cheek when she looked down."

"How they must have tickled," I once more interpolated.

"The only fault of her face was perhaps a want of colour."

"Result probably of dissipation—hot rooms," interrupted I, but Charley got impatient.

"Positively, Fred, I will tell you no more, if you won't attend."

"Attend, my dear fellow! my little remarks are all to show the unflagging attention with which I am listening. But go on, Charley, I won't say much more if I can help it."

"What more I have to say will soon be said," continued Charley, speaking more to himself than to me—which was rude, but I forgave him. "I have seldom had a more witty and intellectual companion. She could talk of every subject below the stars and some beyond them. I can't talk to women generally; for I can't pay compliments, and never go to the opera. But this woman was as reasonable as a man, while she was as quick as a woman."

"Ah, intellectual women—wisdom and water; I know," suggested I, but this time so low that he did not hear me, and went on.

"It had meanwhile got dark, but there was a young moon, and by the uncertain light of the lamp, I could only see the soft outline of her figure and the dazzling whiteness of her face, supported by her hand on which I, for the first time, noticed a wedding-ring; but, to my surprise, the hand was streaked with blood. 'Good gracious! madam, I am afraid you have hurt your hand,' I said, starting forward.

"I have not hurt it," she replied faintly, 'it is stained.'

"She did not attempt to move it or to change her position, and I sat looking at it and at the

wedding-ring, and wondering what her history was, i.e., thinking it must be a mournful one, for she never once smiled—not even the shadow of a smile—all the time we were talking, though we were witty enough, as I have told you—"

"I heard you say she was," I replied, "and don't deny the possibility of that; but from what I know of you, can scarcely credit it of you both."

"—when a sudden gust of wind coming whistling down the cutting, extinguished the lamp—" ("What a disagreeable smell it must have made," said I.)—"and left us in perfect darkness. 'How very unfortunate,' said I to the lady, 'just as we are coming to a tunnel, too.' I thought I heard a faint sigh and her dress rustling. I remember thinking how cold it was in that tunnel. There was such a rush of cold damp air over us; then we began to emerge and I wondered with a kind of childish speculation how soon, by the feeble moonlight, I should be able to trace her outline on the opposite seat. I sat with my eyes fixed on it, but could see nothing. It is too dark, thought I to myself, though I could distinguish the divisions of the seats and my cloak and rug on one of them. 'We must get the lamp re-lighted,' said I, aloud, but there was no answer, and I shivered at the sound of my own voice. I bent forward and felt over the seats. I could feel nothing there. I spoilt match after match of my cigar lights, as I endeavoured to make one burn. I thought we should never stop again; at last, however, we came to a station, and I hallo'd to the guard to light the lamp. 'The door is not locked after all your promises,' said I to him, 'take it out that way.'

"I beg your pardon, sir," said a porter, 'the door is locked;' and he lighted the lamp from the top.

"I was alone in the carriage. 'Good heavens!' said I, 'where is the lady?'

"The men stared at me. 'I tell you there was a lady here,' I repeated, 'she must have got out in the tunnel.'

"There was no lady, sir," said the guard; but the porter, with a mysterious face, shook his head, and said, 'Ah, you've seen her, too, sir, have you?'

"The train, however, went on at that moment, and I had no time to investigate the subject further. Well, Fred, what do you think? Don't think me mad, for it is true."

"Mad! certainly not, my dear fellow, only a little sleepy, as indeed your most interesting story has made me."

"I was not asleep, Fred," replied Charley; "I was as broad awake as I am now. Besides, the porter evidently knew there was a mystery."

"Oh, if you are going to make the whole thing turn upon the porter's shaking his head, I have done with you," said I, incredulously. "I could make as good a romance, and call it the Porter's Wink, if that is all that is necessary. Seriously, Charley, how can you be such an old fool? You had been dreaming, or else eating cat-pie at the last station."

Charley shook his head, and began murmuring something about never eating cat-pies at stations.

"Well, at any rate," said I, "I did, the very last time we stopped, and I think it must have been an old Tom; the remembrance of it makes me so uncomfortable I must go to sleep at once." Thus speaking, I wrapped myself well in my rug, as I naturally did not believe a word of the narrative with which my friend Charley had favoured me.

CHAPTER II.

I MIGHT have been asleep half an hour and more when I suddenly woke up, feeling thoroughly chilled and uneasy, and, looking up, saw Charley who was sitting opposite me, with such a look of terror and amazement on his pale face that I immediately put down my uneasy slumbers to his account.

"Good heavens! Charley," said I, "how the dickens do you expect a fellow to sleep if you sit pulling such long faces opposite him. No wonder I couldn't keep quiet. What is the matter now? Still thinking of your mysterious fiddlesticks?"

"Hush!" said Charley, "there she is!"

I jumped round—sure enough next the other window on my side sat a lady, wrapped, as Charley had described, in a white bournous; the curl of which he had spoken escaping from under the thick veil which concealed her face from us. I'm not such a fool as I look in general, but I must say I was a little staggered for a moment: my next impulse was to enter into conversation with her.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said I, raising my hat, "I am afraid you must have thought I used strong language just now, but I felt myself aggrieved by my friend, as I am a very light sleeper, and I considered he had disturbed me by the very disagreeable face he was making."

"I should not have thought you so light a sleeper, either, sir," replied a sweet low voice, as the lady bowed in return, "for you did not seem to heed the bustle of the Junction on my getting in." So saying she raised her veil, and the identical soft brown eyes Charley had spoken of gazed sadly at me from her astonishingly white brow.

"Take some sherry, Charley," said I, handing him the flask, for I saw his whole frame quivering. "And may I offer you some, madam?"

"None, thank you," she replied.

Charley's hand shook so he dropped the stopper, and it rolled towards her. She picked it up, and restored it to me. Her glove was off.

"Heavens, madam! is it broken? It has cut your hand!" I exclaimed, "it is bleeding."

"I have not hurt it, it is stained," was the quiet answer.

I was getting very uncomfortable; how was this? I know one often has a feeling when a thing takes place. I have done this before. I know exactly what is going to happen next: but it was something more than *that* now. Was I dreaming? surely not, for I heard the train go whizzing on through the evening air, the occasional whistle, the flash of a light as we passed a station, stopping sometimes, and hearing feet crushing the wet gravel; while all the time Charley sat opposite, pale and strange looking, and I could see his lip tremble when the light

shone on him. Beside me sat our silent companion, still and motionless, her face resting as Charley had described it, on the stained hand. I tried to shake off the feelings of dread that were creeping over me, and turning to her began a conversation with her. I found that Charley had indeed not exaggerated her powers of mind, and we were still talking (she and I), when I became aware of a singular movement of the carriage in which we were, which increased till we were swung violently backwards and forwards. Then there was a tremendous crash, the carriage upset, and all seemed going to pieces. An immense spar struck the lady violently on the head: I heard a crunching of delicate bones, saw Charley sinking under another: I myself was stunned by the concussion. When I recovered, there seemed nothing round me but a mass of broken timbers; but after a time I distinguished Charley, lying bleeding and insensible under the debris. The greater mass, however, seemed on the lady's side. I groped my way to her, and shuddering to think what I should find there, with no expectation of there being any answer to my question, remembering what I had heard and seen against that small head, I asked how much she was hurt?

"Not at all, I thank you," replied the sweet low voice I never thought to hear again. "How is your friend?"

"He is insensible; I cannot, I fear, extricate him. Can I assist you?"

"Do not mind me," she answered; "go at once for assistance for your friend."

"But I cannot leave you so." I was trying to remove the spars that lay over her; how she could breathe under such a weight astonished me, for I could not move one, and they lay right on her chest.

"Only assist me to extricate my hand, and then hasten away," she answered; "you cannot help me otherwise."

With the greatest exertion I managed to effect an opening, through which she passed her hand. I started, for the blood seemed fresh on it. The next moment I remembered the singular stain. I took hold of it to pull it through; it was deadly, heavy, cold, and sent a shiver to my very soul.

"Now go," she said, "you can do no more for me, and your friend's life may be at stake. Oh go!"

I had indeed been neglecting poor Charley. I now freed his head and chest as much as I could, and then crept out to see if I could get help. It was a frightful scene as I made my way out: there were a few glaring torches, brought from the next station, which we were near, and people running madly up and down; whilst among the broken timbers you saw mangled, bleeding bodies, helplessly, hopelessly entangled. Another train running into ours seemed to have caused the accident by throwing us down an embankment. I was fortunate enough to fall in with the guard of our train (who happened to be an old servant of our family, and knew me well), directing some fellows with spades to dig for the passengers, and prevailed upon him to begin with our carriage.

I set them to work on poor Charley, who was still insensible, and climbed over to the other side

to encourage the lady. I found her as I had left her.

"Make haste, my lady," said I, "the lady is still conscious."

"What lady, sir?" said the guard, coming towards me. "There was no one in the carriage you recollect, Mr. Frederick, but you and the poor gentleman. You told me to lock you in."

"But there *was* a lady, I tell you, got in afterwards—there is a lady—here under our feet; help me to move these timbers, man."

The man stared at me, as if he thought me insane; but helped to remove one or two spars, and she raised herself on her arm.

"Gently, gently, man," said I. "You will let that fall on the lady's head again. Can you rise now, madam?" and I held out my hand.

"My good sir—my dear sir—there is no one there," said the guard, catching my outstretched arm. "By Heavens, I think he is gone mad! Mr. Frederick!"

"No one there—what do you mean?" said I, shaking him off. "You must be mad. Come, madam;" and as I touched her cold hand she rose to her feet, as if she cast the timber off her like water. "You will set her cloak on fire, man!" I exclaimed, rushing on the guard, who was waving his torch so close to us, I thought the light garment of my companion must catch the flame.

"Now do'ee come away, sir—there's nothing there—nothing but the broken timbers," replied the man, soothingly. "I believe the poor gentleman's head is turned," he added to one of the other men.

A fearful sensation overpowered me—was she then invisible? By this time Charley was extricated, and with the assistance of one of the men, whom I retained to help me, we carried him to the station-house. The lady walked noiselessly by our side. I do not know if the other man was aware of her presence. I almost thought that Charley felt it, unconscious as he appeared, for the expression of his face changed as she came to his side. It was a mournful walk; but we reached the station-house at last, and placed him on one of the sofas in the waiting-room. The lady stood by his side, like a tall statue, still wrapped in her white cloak. She was still standing there when I came back from inquiring for the nearest doctor; one had been sent for, and was expected to arrive immediately.

"A doctor is coming," I said; "perhaps we can do something meanwhile. Can you chafe his hands?"

"Is *this* likely to warm them?" she replied, softly, laying her icy hand for one moment on mine; the touch almost paralysed it.

"You are ill yourself!" I exclaimed. "What can I do? Rest yourself."

"Rest. Oh, Heavens!" she answered, waving me away. "Do not think of me. I cannot rest; attend to your friend."

The advice was good. I knelt down by Charley, loosened his cravat, and endeavoured to staunch the blood that flowed from the wound in his head. She stood at a little distance from us, her arms folded on her breast, and an expression of intense agony on her pale face. I was still busy

with my friend, when I heard the clatter of horses' hoofs outside: the door opened, and at the same moment a dreadful shriek rang through the air, and turning, I saw the lady had disappeared, and a stout, middle-aged man standing in the doorway. That dreadful shriek had penetrated even to Charley's slumbering brain; he opened his eyes, and faintly asked where he was.

Meanwhile, the new comer, who proved to be the doctor, advanced hastily towards me, and in agitated tones inquired in the name of Heaven who the lady was?

"I know nothing of her," said I, "except that she travelled with us part of the way. Where can she be gone now?"

"Do not go. Do not go after her," exclaimed Charley, faintly detaining me, as I was rushing from the room. "Is she gone? It must be about the time she disappeared before."

In spite of his remonstrances, I, however, went out, and inquired of the people in the outer room which way the lady in the white cloak had gone? They all denied having seen any such lady either enter or go out, and even the man who had helped me to carry Charley, evidently thought I was delirious in talking of the lady who had walked by our side.

I returned to the waiting-room, where the doctor was binding up Charley's wounds, and told him of my fruitless researches, and asked what he knew of her? He replied that he did not know her; but was struck by her likeness to a lady whom he had attended in that neighbourhood some years before, whose husband had been killed in a railway accident, not far from this very station.

"What became of the lady?" I asked.

"She died," was the short answer.

I fancied I heard a moan run through the building as he spoke, but it might have been merely my excited fancy. He was not at first disposed to communication on the subject; but Charley's hurts were severe; for some time he was under Dr. Healdall's treatment, and from him we at last gained the history of the lady whose mysterious likeness had disappeared so suddenly on his arrival with us. She had confided it to him on her death-bed.

It appeared she had married a rich cotton-spinner, many years older than herself, and in order to save her favourite brother from disgrace and ruin, she had forged her husband's name to cheques for an amount which freed her brother. The husband, however, had discovered the fraud: he put the police on the track of the brother, and carried her off with him, intending to take her to Glasgow, to confront her with the manager of the bank there on which the forgeries had been drawn. They seemed to have had a frightful quarrel in the railway carriage, he reproaching her with her dishonesty, and she fiercely upbraiding him with wishing to deliver her brother to justice.

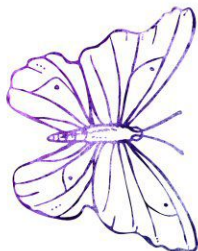
"Sooner than you should succeed!" she cried in her passion, "may we never reach our journey's end—may I rather see you dead at my feet!"

He started up, saying he would travel no longer in the same carriage with her, and thrust his head

through the window to call to the guard that he wished to change his seat at the next station.

As he stood with his head and part of his body out of the window, she saw they were coming to a tunnel! They were on the line next the wall; she saw it coming—and coming; but she *would* not speak. The next moment there was a blow—a crunch, and her husband's *corps* fell heavily across her lap with the skull fractured by concussion against the wall. How she travelled miles in the darkening afternoon of that awful twenty-ninth of February, with that dead body on her knee, her fair hand stained by his blood, how when they found her at last, she was almost paralysed to idiotcy; how she lingered but a few weeks after him, and then faded away a prey to the deepest remorse, time and space fail me to tell here; but Dr. Healall's narrative was as solemn as it was thrilling, and both Charley and I left M—, sobered and saddened men.

ANON.



ONE NIGHT ON THE STAGE.

BY HELEN DOWNES.



[See page 279.]

CHAPTER I. THE IMPRESARIO.

MR. ROSSI sat in his study (his "studio" he always called it), a large, comfortable, but not over-tidy room in Charles Street. The walls were covered with portraits of theatrical celebrities. John Kemble with his solemn face and mourning-dress, skull in hand, Grisi as Norma, Malibran as Desdemona; whilst, above these noble tragic countenances, Taglioni, as La Sylphide, balanced herself buoyantly, amidst scenic shrubs and rose-bushes, on the extreme point of her small white satin shoe. Letter-boxes and card-racks were filled to overflowing; a bouquet of exotics, fading for want of fresh water, exhaled its dying sweetness amidst rolls of music, printed or copied, a large receptacle for cigars and a smaller one for their ashes. Each article was costly, yet the *ensemble* was dirty and disorderly. Several musical instruments scattered about might have led to the belief that the owner was an artist, had not something in the man himself contradicted this first impression. He was a short barrel of a man, with a face struggling between its native John Bullishness and its assumed foreign decorations; a round bald head with the hair brushed up very much at the sides, prominent grey eyes, a large full mouth displaying a row of the most regular white teeth (in fact, a set of "Rogers's new patent without metal fastenings"), and a splendid crop of whiskers and moustachios dyed to the darkest brown which could be supposed to

belong to the owner of the light eyes. Jack Ross—or as he signed himself *Giacomo Rossi*—was the son of a country grocer who, coming up to London, to spend his patrimony, and having succeeded by the help of various theatrical tastes, had ended by engaging a provincial theatre, and managing it very satisfactorily, until step by step he had worked his way back to London to speculate grandly as a manager there.

As Rossi sat buried in his cushioned chair, slowly puffing his Havannah, he also studied a sample advertisement just offered to him by a pale, thin, poverty-stricken youth, who stood humbly before him listening to his employer, as he read aloud to judge of its effect:—

"Giacomo Rossi having, we understand, realised a snug little fortune abroad by his very successful administration of theatrical domains—"

"Not bad that, Crowe"—[puff from cigar].—

"—'is enabled to undertake what less successful managers have in vain attempted.'"—[Puff].—

"He has taken the Regent Theatre for the purpose of establishing a genuine English opera company—English in every sense—singers, scene painters, decorators, all are to be natives of our own isle, and Britons may learn that they are no more to be conquered in the field of art than in that of war. The company—"

"No, Crowe; I don't like company, it's vulgar; put *corps dramatique*."

"I thought," said Crowe, quietly, "it was to be all English."

"Why, what a fool you are, Crowe! Do you think they would ever have any faith in the concern if it were advertised in plain English? Well, to proceed."

"—'The *corps dramatique* is composed entirely of English *artistes*, and the season is to open by the production of an entirely new opera from the pen of our clever—'

"No; not clever, I prefer *gifted*."

"—'Of our gifted countryman, Hugo Rossini Smith, entitled *Joan of Arc*, or the *Maid of Domremy*.'"

"So far so good; but now should come the list of singers, and I have found no English prima-donna—in fact, there is none to find. I must have something good to keep up the house, for there is old Barber to do the Dauphin—enough to empty it any night, except just of a few old fogies who remember him sixty years ago, and still swear by him. To engage a foreigner would be too flagrant after all my promises. Miss Watson is my only chance—a magnificent voice! but, fudge! what can she do with it? And as for acting, my walking-stick would have more idea of it."

"Some one knocked at the door, sir."

"Then open it!"

The meek Crowe obeyed, and the visitor came strolling in, and dropped, as if exhausted, into the arm-chair opposite Smith. He was a very tall, gaunt, young man, with tolerably good features and eyes, a beard of several days' growth, a shirt of apparently several weeks' wear, and the cuffs, very much ink-stained, turned back to display a pair of long bony hands, armed with black claws, which evidently had not even a passing acquaintance with soap and water. If only this man could have been washed, and shaved, and clothed afresh, you would have considered him a very good-looking fellow. Ah! what a mistake. Hugo Rossini Smith was a genius on the strength of his dirt, his rudeness, and his eccentricities; his musical talent was ordinary enough, but his appearance was unique.

I once knew an old match-seller who, from illness, was reduced to enter the workhouse, where she was at once put into a warm-bath, and, when she emerged again into society, her picturesqueness, her misery, had faded away; she only looked like any other clean, comfortable, old woman, and her trade was bad in proportion to her cleanliness. It took her months to acquire once more her stock in trade of rags and ingrained filth, and she would speak with great pathos of the workhouse episode of her existence, exclaiming:—"They bil'd me, my dear! they bil'd me!" That bath would have been equally fatal to the great composer Hugo Rossini Smith; it would have reduced him to the ordinary standard of civilised men. Now, he was beyond the pale of proprieties, and less bold spirits worshipped him accordingly—women particularly, who would delight in the pressure of that greasy palm, and look up with admiration at that grimy face.

Yes; Mr. Smith was a genius. "Our great English composer" was his ordinary cognomen.

The great Englishman's melodies reminded you of Auber; but his own playing of his own compositions had the effect of some prodigious steam mechanism (at least to the uninitiated)—buzz—whizz—up and down—ease her—back her—let her go—crescendo—accelerando to the very last chord, when it ended in a sudden explosion, with apparently no object at all for all that fuss. You draw a long breath at finding that you are not literally blown up; but Hugo's face meanwhile beams with inspiration, he shakes his long locks, sways his body to and fro, kicks his legs about, convulsed by the throes of genius like the Pythones of antiquity, and you are half convinced that there was really a cause for all this stir as the great artist wheels round on his music-stool, pale, limp, exhausted, apparently unheeding the reviving cries around of "Wonderful!" "Admirable!" You do him justice; it was *surprising*, but it would have been puzzling to explain what others *admired*.

"Well, Smith, my good fellow, comment ça va? Try a cigar?"

"But so-so," was the reply, whilst the dirty hand grasped the proffered cigar. "I'm worked to death, Rossi—absolutely dead! They won't let me alone."

"Well, I'm glad you have found your way here at any rate, I wanted to speak to you. I'm afraid we shall have to engage Miss Watson, after all."

"Miss Watson translate my immortal Joan!—never!"

"Then Joan won't be translated, as you call it, at all; she'll be a dead language"—and the manager was still laughing at his own wit when the door opened, and Crowe announced "A lady, sir, wishes to see you!" Rossi looked somewhat embarrassed. "A strange lady," explained the man, and Rossi's brow cleared. "She would not give her name, she wanted you solely on business, she said," and even as he spoke the visitor entered.

She was a dark elegant woman, not very young nor very pretty, and after a glance of curiosity the great composer subsided into a reverie, still puffing his cigar, and watching in profound abstraction the curling wreaths of smoke. The manager, not being a genius, could afford to be civil, so threw the remainder of his cigar into the fire, and placed a comfortable seat for the lady, as far as possible from the smoker.

"I heard that you were forming an English company," began the lady with forced composure, "and I am come to offer myself to you as chief soprano."

The manager stared at her boldness, the composer twisted himself round to examine her more closely, and both looked at each other with a slight smile at her astonishing presumption. For in spite of her calm bold words she was a modest-looking woman, evidently not one of themselves, but of that class commonly known as shabby-genteel. But the Impresario piqued himself on his politeness to the weaker sex, so he merely asked courteously: "May I know, madam, what have been your previous engagements?"

"I never sang in public in my life, but I was at one time well used to private theatricals" (the composer's lips curled in intense scorn, and Rossi could hardly conceal his smile.) "My voice has

been well cultivated—Crivelli was my master. You have only to judge for yourself. I do not ask to be engaged by you unless you are satisfied of my competency."

Rossi rose and opened his piano with a sly glance at his friend, who returned it, and both prepared for a little amusement at the poor lady's expense.

"Do you prefer accompanying yourself?" he asked.

"No, I can sing better standing, of course."

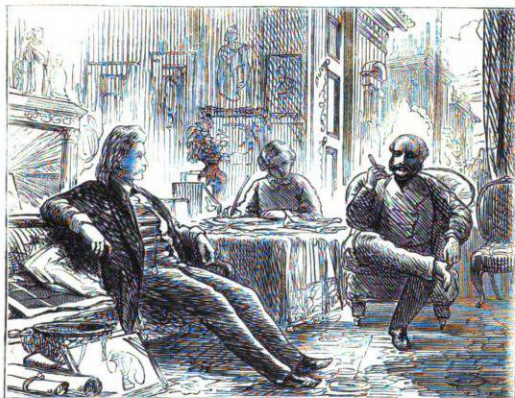
"And what am I to have the honour of playing?"

"Choose for yourself—I will refuse if I do not like your selection."

Here Smith rose, and turning over a pile of music rather maliciously, drew from thence the opera of Robert le Diable.

"See," said he, "suppose you give us this first great air of Alice, 'Va! dit-elle.'"

A pleased look stole over the lady's face, and she assented cheerfully—taking off her bonnet,



she stood quietly by the piano. She looked so much handsomer now that her beautiful head was revealed, wreathed with silky coils of black hair, and her eye sparkled with so bright an intelligence that the gentlemen somewhat abated their scorn, and were not so much surprised at the rich quality of the voice which struck upon their ear. There was a little tremor in the first words of that message of the dying mother to her libertine son, but that was soon lost in the earnestness of her own enjoyment of the music; and as she threw her whole soul and voice into the last reiteration of the phrase, "Sa mère pria pour lui!" those two men who had so long made a mere trade of the beautiful art were subdued, enchanted, conquered entirely. There was a decided moisture in Rossi's blue eyes, and the composer for five whole minutes ceased to remember the existence of the great Hugo Rossini Smith! And the pale, shabbily-dressed woman, who felt their emotion, stood without no feeling of triumph in her breast, but a prayer of thankfulness for her success—she had children at home who wanted bread!

There was a silence of some moments, during which the manager recovered his presence of mind, and remembered that he must now probably drive a bargain.

"Very finely rendered, madam, I must say—no doubt as to your voice and method—but are you quick at study?"

"I can keep pace with the others, I suppose."

"We mean to begin by an entirely new opera. Allow me to introduce you to the composer, Mr. Smith, whom doubtless you already know musically, and in my turn may I ask your name?"

The lady blushed and hesitated. The manager laughed.

"Not provided with a *nom de guerre*, eh? Suppose we say Miss Percy—Maude Percy?"

The name was accepted. There was a long conversation about salary, length of engagement, rehearsals, and other matters of business, and the lady hastened to her humble home with the first act of Joan of Arc in her hand, to work her very hardest, while the two men in the most delighted enjoyment adjourned to an oyster luncheon at Verey's.

"I tell you what, Smith, that is a lady of rank in disguise!"

"Nonsense, you don't know her."

"Well, if she is not, she is to be; so hint the report everywhere.—Your health, Miss Percy, in a bumper of Chablis."

And whilst the lady walked on full of hope, and the gentlemen drank, poor humble Crowe sat before the open piano with the song she had sung unfolded before him, in a perfect stupor of delight at the sounds which still rang in his ears. Poor fellow, he had come out as a boy prodigy under Rossi's management, but his voice had failed, his health had failed—worse than all, his spirit had failed; and he was now a sort of secretary—in truth, a servant—to the man who had once made a

handsome little fortune by him. Music was his only happiness, but it was beyond his reach now that his childish voice was lost. Nature had allowed him small intelligence, but had given him a sensitive heart.

CHAPTER II. JOAN OF ARC.

REHEARSALS went off periodically, throwing the composer into alternate fits of hope and dejection, as the stars lent to his music a character to which he had scarcely himself aspired, or the chorus, on the other hand, drove him to despair with false notes and bad time, for which he was also not responsible. Great was the interest excited by the unknown prima donna, who seemed to belong to no one, to come from nowhere. The manager did his best to encourage the mystery, and whilst declaring he knew nothing of her residence, family, &c., assumed an amused air as if he knew a great deal, and could astonish them not a little if he were not bound to secrecy. As for Hugo Rossini Smith, he entirely lost what heart he had. She would make his fortune, increase his reputation; he hardly knew his own airs again, such melody did her exquisite voice lend to them, such passion did she give to his tamest passages. The opera promised to be highly successful, the cognoscenti admitted to the rehearsals raved about Joan of Arc. It is true that the plan of the work reminded them of a well-known modern French drama, and that there was scarcely a movement of which they could not say, "I think I have heard that before," but then if not original it was not ugly; there were some startling orchestral effects, the scenery and costumes were superb, and, above all, there was Maude Percy, the new English prima donna. The print-shops were full of portraits of Maude Percy, a tall tragic lady, in very complete evening costume, bearing not even a shadow of resemblance to the original save in the arrangement of the hair.

But when Smith expressed his admiration in the most glowing terms (he who had hitherto been content with allowing himself to be admired), the lady cut him short in the coldest language, and seemed entirely bent on understanding music only, and perfecting her operatic part. Once when he went into a rhapsody on her personal charms—her hair, her eyes, her graceful figure—she turned to him quickly, "Ah! if I could only believe in the sincerity of your praise!"

"Well, if you could, what then—speak!"

"Why, it would be a great relief, for others may prove as indulgent as you are, and I am tormented with the idea that after all the public may think it absurd in a woman of thirty to personate the youthful maid of Orleans."

"The public, it is always the public!" muttered the disappointed composer, biting his dirty nails.

"Undoubtedly it is—for whom are we working both of us? For whom am I to act and sing? Who is to establish my profession for me?" and she walked away without awaiting an answer. How unlike the flattery Hugo was in the habit of receiving from the fair sex, and yet he perpetually renewed his court to meet with nothing but coldness, disdain even. One comfort had he—no one was more successful than himself—if he might not be happy he could not be jealous. Only poor

Crowe hovered about the stage, and seemed more stupid than ever after each rehearsal; above all, if he won, as he sometimes did, a kind look or word from the bright star.

At length the great night arrived: the little pursy manager bustled to and fro behind the scenes in a very mingled condition of pleasure, anxiety, and excitement. The composer, got up for the occasion in the most romantic style, in vain endeavoured to conceal his agitation, and to keep up the poetical abstracted reverie in which he feigned to live, careless alike of the world's praise or censure.

"A capital house, Smith, capital house! boxes filling fast, and not standing room in the pit; and I understood there was such a crowd at the lobby door that three ladies fainted and one man had his arm broken; quite beyond my hopes, really—but I am afraid it is too good to be true. Come now, you fellows, clear away those pewter pots; can't you wait to get drunk till you have done your work? Ah! there's Dubois—no though, egad! I must not call him by his own name, I forgot it was changed to Harrison—he takes his baton. Now for your overture, Smith. What a pretty house it is!"

But Hugo Smith could not distinguish a note of his overture for the intense throbbing of his heart; he stood unconsciously wiping away the cold damp from his forehead with a white handkerchief, till Rossi shoved him aside, and bade him go to his box, for the curtain was just about to be drawn up. The overture was received coldly enough, but loud were the plaudits that greeted the opening scene—the distant village of Domremy, the little inn, the open green where stood a rough stone trough, surmounted by a rude cross. Here were assembled a troop of mercenary soldiers recently beaten by the English, who sang of course the opening drinking chorus, throwing their tin cups into the air and drinking out of them again, after the orthodox habit of stage wine-bibbers. But the last verse was little heeded, for from the inn steps out a slight graceful figure, on whom all eyes are instantly fixed. She watches the soldiers enter the inn-porch, before she slowly advances to the foot-lights as a soft symphony is played. There she stands, in a costume as simple, an attitude as pensive, as Scheffer's beautiful home-sick Mignon, and scarcely looking older. With true taste she takes no notice of the applause called forth by her appearance, nor drops a prima-donna curtsy, forgetful of the peasant maiden. A few words of recitative, descriptive of the miserable state of the subdued country, revealed the richness of her organ, and then burst forth the grand air in which she dedicated herself to the service of France, ending by a prayer for divine assistance. It was no longer an actress, a singer, it was the Maid herself; her dark eyes beaming with inspiration, her slight form glowing with courage, her whole person noble and exalted. From that moment all comments were hushed. The audience followed her, as in a trance, through all the scenes, listening only to her: when she knelt reverentially before the holy visions; when she entered the church at midnight to claim the mysterious sword; when she stood by the Dauphin

with her white banner to witness his coronation ; when she rallied the soldiers on the walls of Orleans ; when she wept alone, wounded, dejected in her prison ; when she walked firmly to the blazing pile, singing the prayer of the first scene, once more dignified and inspired. The curtain fell ; then, and then only, did admiration find a voice, the whole house rose in a tumult of delight—the women waved their handkerchiefs, wet with their tears, the men shouted and threw flowers on the stage, and the pale exhausted singer bowed modestly and withdrew. It was not till there was no hope of coaxing her back, that there was a feeble call for the composer, who instantly rushed on in a wild eccentric fashion, and shook his long mane at the public, who, alas ! had nearly forgotten him.

When he withdrew he eagerly sought out the heroine of the night. She was going away as usual alone : it was clear she had no husband, no brother, no belongings ; on such a night of triumph who would not have been proud to have appeared as her escort ?

"Will you not allow me to see you safely home?" he whispered, as he opened the door of the cab.

She hesitated an instant. "Yes," she said, "this once you shall see my home."

He jumped in delighted, exclaiming, "There will soon be an end of hackney cabs ; a neat little brougham and a fine horse and stylish liveries—that must soon be yours. And jewels ! why I'll engage that by this time to-morrow you will be half a dozen diamond bracelets richer than you are to-day. Alas, poor me ! what chance shall I have then ?"

He looked languishing, but she did not seem to understand him, and he was afraid of going too far lest she should be offended instead of indifferent. At last the cab stopped. They entered a mean dingy-looking house, the door of which was opened by an old female servant, who looked in intense surprise at the hirsute composer. No one came forward, anxious to hear of her triumph : there was no word, no smile of welcome for the lone woman who had that night become the queen of a vast and coveted empire. She took the candle from her servant, and ascended the staircase, followed by the wondering Smith, who noticed that the stair carpet was worn to its last shreds, that the paper, the paint, all he could see, were old, meagre, poverty-stricken. She opened a door on the first landing, and held the candle over a bed where lay sleeping a handsome boy of ten years old. She passed through into another room, where two little girls reposed, side by side, a lovely picture of innocence and confidence. O how beautiful, how tender was the gaze of the mother who contemplated them, and how its very purity rebuked the watcher of the group.

"There, sir, now you have seen my home ; these children depend entirely on my exertions ; and I have no aim in this life but their welfare—they alone have caused me to exercise my one talent, at any cost. The diamond bracelets you spoke of, the increased salary—all, all would be changed into food and clothing for them. I value no praise, no compliment, but as a means of helping them."

There was a pause of some moments, whilst the

man turned his eyes alternately from the happy children to the pale over-worked mother.

"Have you then lost your husband?" he asked, in a softened tone.

A look of anguish crossed her features, and with a burning blush she answered, "Yes : I have lost him—he is gone !" And the composer understood that she was not a widow. Her husband lived, but he was lost, indeed—he was a drunkard !

"Thank you," said Smith, with altered mien, "I shall not forget your home ; I will intrude on you no longer." And with a respectful bow he left the poor shabby house, sanctified by the presence of pure maternal love.

(To be continued.)

ONE NIGHT ON THE STAGE.

BY HELEN DOWNES.



[See page 321.]

CHAPTER III. TRIBULATION.

MRS. NEVILLE (that was Maude Percy's real name) retired to rest very late that night; she was so tired, so exhausted, she could scarcely call forth courage to undress, yet when she was in bed she could not sleep. This wonderful success, this lucrative career opened to her when all else had failed, the immense efforts she had made to conquer her timidity, and the enthusiasm she had raised—all excited her so much, that, fatigued as she was, she never closed her eyes! Each hour she grew more restless, and more desirous to compose herself and gain strength for the next night.

But when evening returned, the house filled in vain; in vain the manager bustled, the composer wondered. At length he sent Crowe in a cab to the house he had visited the night before, to bring back the missing star instantly. Crowe returned in half an hour with red eyes, and his pale face paler even than usual. He had found the poor prima donna lying delirious with fever, now singing a few notes of recitative, now talking wildly about diamond bracelets to feed her chil-

dren, whilst they sat apart in a little room, where the old servant had placed them, frightened and weeping. Messrs. Smith and Rossi were in despair; they sent able physicians to prescribe for her, they came often to see if she wanted anything. For six weeks her life was in danger; and when at last she recovered her bodily strength, her voice was grand as before, but her mind appeared shattered for ever. She sang exquisitely, but at random; she could learn nothing new, she could go through with nothing consecutively. Dreadful was the mortification of the manager and his friend; she would rehearse for them some beautiful passage which awakened all their hopes of claiming her once more for their theatre; she would promise to attend rehearsals and resume her labours; but when the hour came, she had forgotten their very existence, and was sitting quietly mending her children's clothes, and singing melodiously over her work. O it was too tantalising to see such talent and make no use of it! Rossi began to feel personally aggrieved, and when the doctors talked of the great pressure on her brain,

replied angrily, "What the devil did she study so hard for? I'm sure I never urged her; she would have been immeasurably superior to any one else, if she had taken it easy and husbanded her own strength." He tried Miss Watkins, and Joan of Arc ceased to please; the house emptied, the speculation failed, and the manager set off for a professional tour in the provinces, resolving never again to establish an English company. But he left behind him his hitherto faithful Crowe, who hung on Smith from the time that he found the musician pretty constant in his attentions to Mrs. Neville: for Smith could not utterly abandon the woman he had admired so warmly—that respect he had felt for her, as she repulsed his suit, by the sight of her sleeping children, continued still, for the virtues which had called it forth were not dimmed like the brightness of her intellect. What if she did lose the thread of a long conversation, and break forth like a bird into smatches of exquisite melody—she was always the same simple, modest lady, the same tender, loving mother; and though poor Joan of Arc had ended her victories when Maude Percy ceased to represent her, the composer could not forget the delight of that one night of exultation, nor the gentle rebuke which had followed the triumph.

So he often sought out the poor lady and consulted with the old servant on means of supporting her. It ended in his procuring pupils for her, and though they were not a first-rate connection, it proved a living for her children; and the genius who had once stood unrivalled, now uncomplainingly taught the "Sol-fa" to the flaunting daughters of the butcher who supplied her with meat, or cancelled the baker's bill by teaching his boy who had a "wonderful notion of singing." The high-minded woman saw no degradation there, as she had before seen no disgrace in her public position. What cared she, so that her children were honestly provided for? In the blaze of her triumph, as in the dim twilight, her children were all her care—her forsaken children who depended on her alone! Even in her bitterest trial, the wrong done to them had been the keenest pang the mother had suffered, far more than the wife. One other friend she had; the clergyman of her parish was one of those hard-working men who do wonders with the most limited time and the scantiest purse, and no sooner did he hear of her illness than he found a hundred kindnesses in his power; his was not the religion of the Pharisee, who sees sin in all that differs from his own views, and it never occurred to him, who had never set foot within a playhouse, to reproach the woman who had ventured on the stage for the support of her fatherless family. Had she been a nun in a convent, he would not have deemed her purer.

One morning as Hugo Rossini Smith was rehearsing one of those wonderful gymnastic exercises with which he was wont to charm an enlightened public, Crowe entered the room and stationed himself patiently behind the music-stool, till the maestro having worked himself up to fever-heat turned round and beheld an unwonted look of animation on his usually depressed physiognomy.

"O, sir! I have made such a discovery!"

"Concerning what?"

"Well, sir, I have been talking to Master Neville, and I let out to him that I was sure his mother was a lady born. You know Mr. Rossi always said so, too."

"Pshaw! That was only his humbug. He wanted to make her more mysterious; he never meant it."

"Well, sir, if he did not, I do. I have seen ladies in plenty in my better days, and have been caressed and praised by them. She is a lady out-and-out, and I knew it the first time I opened the door to her, for all that her dress was so shabby. Well, I told this to the boy, and he coloured up in a proud sort of way. 'Yes,' he said, 'you are right, but say nothing about it; mamma never will allow us to mention it; her father is Sir John Beauchamp, and he has a beautiful house in London, and one handsomer still in Yorkshire; but mamma says she disobeyed him by marrying, and he has never forgiven her.' Now, sir, don't you think if this baronet knew how hard up she has been, through such an illness, he must help his own daughter?"

"If you knew the aristocracy as I do," replied Smith, with a grand air, "you would be aware that there is no *must* in the case."

"Well, sir, but don't you think one might try? You, for instance, might go and tell them all about her. The boy was sure his mother had had no intercourse with her family for years, so they can't know what she has suffered."

The great composer stroked his moustache thoughtfully.

After some meditation, he took up a large red book from the table: "Well, Crowe, this will give us the address. Here we have it,—Sir John Beauchamp, 4, Hampton Place. You know it leads into Eaton Square; call up your scattered wits and endeavour to obtain, quietly, some information regarding the habits of the family—if there is Lady B., children and so on; if they are musical, intellectual, fashionable, charitable, or what? If you can sound the key-note for me to-night, I will play the overture to-morrow." The youth was departing forthwith. "Stay, Crowe, I declare you look quite radiant; what is it that fascinates you so entirely in poor Mrs. Neville, and thus rouses all your faculties?"

The boy coloured.

"Well, I don't know; she is so unlike the other women I have had to do with; so kind and yet so above me; and then her voice is so lovely!"

Poor Crowe, that voice of hers was his reward for everything! Smith felt much the same towards her, but in a less degree; he was too much taken up with himself to be capable of genuine enthusiasm.

The musician and his secretary did not meet again till the former returned from the musical soirée where he had been acting the lion greatly to his own satisfaction, as usual. Crowe followed him at once to his room:

"I have not learnt much, they are very shut-up people it seems; could hear nothing about Sir John, but there is a Lady Beauchamp much younger than the baronet, and no children. I can't hear that they do anything but go to chapel, or see anybody."

"They shall see ME to-morrow!" returned

Smith, looking at himself in the glass with a thorough consciousness that that vision would by no means rank as a common event in their lives. As soon as he had breakfasted—that is about noon the next day—Hugo Rossini Smith applied for admittance at 4, Hampton Place.

"Sir John sees no one," replied the servant, "but I believe my lady is at home," with a stress on the *believe* called forth, not by doubts as to his mistress's presence, but as to the respectability of the very dirty and extraordinary-looking visitor.

However, he was shown into Lady Beauchamp's drawing-room, where he prepared for her reception. He threw himself in a lounging attitude on the sofa, pulled his neck-tie into a knot still more négligé, fixed his eyes on the ceiling, and drew his fingers through his lanky locks, till the wildness of his appearance was beyond measure ludicrous. Some minutes passed, and Smith grew tired of *posing*, and curiosity strongly prompted him to look round the room. The furniture was costly, but it was not refined; the walls were covered with a few good oil-paintings interspersed with very poor lithographic representations of the Rev. Josiah Pitchitin; the Rev. Josiah Pitchitin's chapel at Kennington; the Rev. Samuel Wheedler, evening lecturer at the Old Road Tabernacle, and other worthies of various features, save in one respect, that they had all heavy fleshy mouths and chins, and very much the *tournaire* of shoemakers in their Sunday clothes, who would appreciate a good dinner with more than even the ordinary gusto of mankind. He looked at the books on the table, all beautifully gilt and bound—presentation copy of the "Saint's Feast;" the "Aroma of Piety," presented with the utmost respect to Lady Beauchamp by Josiah Pitchitin; "Illustrated Hymns used at Salem Chapel." Smith felt dreadfully out of his element, and turned despairingly to the card-basket; but just as he had taken up the first visiting-card, he became miserably conscious of the presence of a tall, frigid, grandly-dressed lady, who stood just within the door watching him with stony glance. O most provoking chance! he had looked, he knew he had, so distinguished in his rerie on the sofa; and, after all, to be detected prying with mundane curiosity into the card-basket. He recovered himself as he could.

"Have I the honour of addressing Lady Beauchamp?"—a very slight inclination of the head—"and can her ladyship spare a quarter of an hour to an artist who has for once travelled out of his sphere to restore a brilliant star to hers?"

The lady seated herself, motioned him to a chair, and placing her jewelled watch on the table, "I have, sir," she said, "exactly ten minutes to give you; state your case as concisely as you can."

"My dearest lady! it is not *my* case, but that of one much nearer to you."

A slight anxious flush rose to the lady's cheek, but she waited patiently for the end.

"You may have heard of me, madam; I am Hugo Rossini Smith, the composer of Joan of Arc, an opera which will yet claim immortality, though at present cruelly obscured. You may have witnessed its brilliant debut."

The lady drew herself up with an air of mingled

surprise and disdain, which said plainer than words could have done: I know nought of such wicked places.

Smith pursued his tale—"The heroine was represented by the most wonderful singer, a genius, a heaven-inspired creature, but for one night only; the excitement of that first performance was too much for her; it produced brain-fever, which has impaired her intellect; yet thus weakened, she is the sole support of her children, for her husband has forsaken her. I must not omit to state, that I am taking this step entirely without her knowledge."

"And why apply to me in favour of this abandoned woman?"

"Abandoned! Good heavens, banish such an idea, she is an angel! a divine creature! pure, lovely! But why I appeal to you, or rather to your husband is, because this unfortunate and most-gifted lady is, I have just ascertained, the daughter of Sir John Beauchamp!"

The lady's face whitened, and her teeth clenched; it was a deadly look of hatred that distorted those features, which she strove evidently to conceal.

"Sir!" she hissed out at length, through her closed teeth, "go back to that vile woman, and tell her to pursue her infamous course as she has hitherto done—*silently*."

"For heaven's sake, madam! consider, this virtuous lady is deeply afflicted—she—"

"Then, sir," interrupted Lady Beauchamp, "tell her to regard her visitation as the justice of Heaven, and may the punishment work repentance in her. I can hold no communication with a stage-player, and her poor father is in no condition to attend to business. I doubt not but that she is well provided with friends of her own stamp, or you, sir, would not now be here begging for her. I have now listened to you for more than ten minutes; allow me to bid you good morning."

Several times during the interview, Smith had noticed a slight movement of the door behind the chair of Lady Beauchamp, and as he mentioned the name of the successful singer, he had distinctly seen the outline of an old man's head start forward, and as quickly retire. He had from that time raised his voice under the impression that it might be Sir John. As he slowly left the room at the command of the imperious lady, he glanced about in hopes of seeing the supposed father, but nought was visible, save a black sheep stealing softly up the stair-case, whom he rightly guessed to be the Rev. Josiah Pitchitin. Even when the smart footman had closed the door on him, he lingered on the steps, hoping he would be followed and recalled by the old shadow, who must have heard his conversation with his wife. Yet no—he might be deaf—he might be imbecile—he might be as merciless as his partner. He was obliged to acknowledge to the eagerly-expectant Crowe, the entire failure of his mission. He did not communicate his doubts to Crowe, but in his own mind he attributed much of his ill-success to his own impatience in having prematurely abandoned his poetic attitude on the sofa, which could not but impress ever so hardened a woman.

However, he did not long brood over his misadventure, but sought and found consolation by

strolling off to some of his usual haunts. Not so poor Crowe; he felt the disappointment keenly. He remained at the musician's desk, copying the musical task allotted to him, but the pen often dropped from his fingers, and the pale face had even a deeper air of dejection than usual, as it looked up occasionally from the confusion of heads and tails which represented one of Smith's fantasies. Suddenly a slight tap at the door startled him; it opened cautiously, and there walked in a large bundle of clothing, which shelled gradually—cloak, paletôt, overcoat, shawl, whilst a voice from within explained in a weak voice, "Excuse me, sir, I begged the servant not to announce me, so much prudence is necessary in my peculiar position. I overheard you this morning telling my—but dear me! I've made some mistake, you are surely not the same gentleman. Can your name be Smith?"

Meanwhile Crowe's eyes were brightening as the process of unstuffing revealed the figure of a feeble old gentleman in his dinner-dress; and in reply to the visitor's question, he put another.

"Are you not Sir John Beauchamp?"

"I am. How can you know me?"

"Oh, sir, do not be alarmed, you may safely trust me; though only the humble secretary of the musician Smith, whom you this morning saw, it was at my suggestion that he visited your house. I know Mrs. Neville, and it was to me that her artless boy revealed her relationship to you."

"Her boy! Then her son still lives?"

"Lives? yes, indeed, he is full of life! a fine healthy fellow of ten years old."

"Yes, ten years—ten long years! And he is a beautiful boy, is he? Alas! and I have no heir—no child!"

"He is a princely fellow, sir, worthy to inherit a dukedom."

"And the mother? Was all that true about her? Did I hear aright? Driven to the stage by poverty? Ill, her mind affected? Can my daughter have suffered so much, and I in ignorance of it?"

"Come and judge for yourself. I will take you to her this very hour, if you will. Your presence might cure her: who knows?"

"But is not her husband there?" asked the old man, slowly, as if each word cost him a pang of pain. "I cannot see him; I cannot, indeed—the brute!"

"You will not. I know nothing of him; but he is never there. He went to Australia years ago. They suppose he must be dead, I believe. But Mrs. Neville—come to her, so sweet a lady! and such a voice! Shall we go at once?"

"I dare not, to-night; there is not time; Lady Beauchamp returns at nine, and she must know nothing. But to-morrow I will. Tell me, can she recognise people? Will she know me? Is she sensible?"

"Oh yes: her memory fails, her mind wanders at times, and she can attend to nothing for long, but she is quite sensible, and she sings more exquisitely than ever. Why, even now, she supports her three children by teaching—by teaching butchers, bakers, grocers. It is a shame! a burning shame!"

The old man could not speak; his head drooped on his breast, and the tears shone on his black coat.

"I must return now," he said, with a start; "but to-morrow, O, good young man! lead me to her to-morrow. Come to my house: I will thank you—reward you! Wait near my house to-morrow evening at seven; you will see her start for chapel (Lady Beauchamp, I mean). When you see the carriage drive off, come within the shadow of the portico, and I will join you instantly. Will you promise?"

"Most willingly. I will not fail!"

The old man hurriedly resumed all the garments which greatly disguised him, and almost ran away. Crowe heard the sound of cab-wheels driving rapidly away, and prayed that the old gentleman might regain his home before the wife he so evidently dreaded. He endeavoured to resume his task, but it was harder than ever now: he blackened the heads of his minims, gave double tails to his quavers, and the whole manuscript became such a mass of hopeless confusion, that when Smith returned, with his accustomed used-up air, he exclaimed, "Why, you've been writing in your sleep, Crowe!"

"No, sir; but he has been here." And then followed a long account of the interview.

Smith was somewhat jealous that he had had only the unsuccessful part of the interference, whilst Crowe seemed likely to bring it to a fair issue; but his natural idleness consoled him by the thought that he would at least have no further trouble.

CHAPTER IV. HOPE ONCE MORE.

SMITH and Crowe were still discussing the various details of the poor prima donna's story, when another sharp rap at the door was heard simultaneously with a well-known voice.

"I say, Smith, old boy, can you give a fellow a night's lodging? They can't take me in till the morning at my old den in Charles Street."

There was no mistaking the short portly form which rolled in, draped in a handsome travelling cloak, and Turkish cap with immense tassel:—none of your common straw hats or felt wide-awakes for the elegant Giacomo Rossi.

"You are welcome, Rossi. Where do you spring from?"

"From Dublin, last, and you shall taste the only good thing that country produces." And he drew from his pocket a silver-mounted travelling-flask full of whiskey. "No; no supper, Smith, thank you; have not yet digested my dinner; just a biscuit and a taste of the cratur! That's right, Crowe, hand the glasses. Bless me, Crowe, how fast you look. I declare you grow quite handsome. There, taste that, Smith."

"Excellent! and as soft as milk."

It may have been very mild, but certainly the appearance of the gentlemen's eyes would not have led you to imagine that milk was the beverage they had been quaffing. Of course the manager was not long before he made inquiries concerning his lost prima-donna, and great was the interest he evinced in the story they related to him. But when the name of Beauchamp was pronounced, he

started, turned suddenly thoughtful, and listened with still greater attention.

"Crowe," he said at last, "have you seen this Lady Beauchamp?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I will accompany you when you go on your errand. I have rather a fancy to see her, and shall watch as she steps into her carriage, without interfering, of course, with you and the old fool. So she is shamming piety, is she? Humph! I think I see my way through this business, but what a double distilled ass Sir John Beauchamp must be!"

Punctually at the appointed hour Rossi and Crowe walked to Hampton Street, where they separated. The carriage—a very gaudy concern, quite new—drove up to the door, the footman handed in some prayer-books, and as he loudly shouted to the coachman, "Salem Chapel!" Rossi passed, as if accidentally, and had a good view of the lady within. Meanwhile Crowe came as directed, and concealed himself in the shadow of the portico, where he was almost instantly joined by a man from within the house.

"All right, sir?"

"Yes, thank you for coming so punctually. We will take a cab at the corner of the street."

But as they were crossing to the stand the baronet's own carriage came wheeling swiftly back with his wife within. The old man stood as if paralysed. The wheel struck him and he fell heavily to the ground. Crowe and Rossi helped him up; he was sensible, but unable to move.

"I much fear my leg is broken," he muttered, groaning with pain.

Rossi lifted up his body, Crowe gently took the legs, and they carried him back to his own house. There was clearly no other course to take. Through the hall they passed (for the door was open and the carriage still waiting), followed by the astonished footman. They laid his master on the first sofa they met with, and ordered the servant to run quickly for the family surgeon. He disappeared, and Lady Beauchamp, who had merely returned for her purse, entered the room. She looked with little emotion at her injured husband, but when she caught sight of Crowe kneeling beside him her face changed fearfully; her eyes dilated; her lips quivered; her colour fled; it was not surprise only—not fear, but a host of conflicting passions which held her mute; trembling, unable to withdraw her eyes from Crowe, who, poor fellow, shrank from her gaze and hid his face in both hands. Rossi, who watched acutely the whole group, saw that Sir John's attention was arrested to the singular expression of his wife's face, and walked up to the statue-like form and laid his hand firmly on her arm. She turned to him and gave a piercing shriek.

"I have recently, madam," he said coolly, "been in the company of a gentleman who was looking for you, and who will be delighted to hear you are so comfortably located. I mean your husband."

"Sir, you must be mistaken," exclaimed Sir John, somewhat fiercely, "that lady is my wife."

"That she cannot be, Sir John. I tell you I

was only yesterday with her husband; his name is Henry Fisher, alias Baron Ormoff, alias Count Des Prés; and I myself had the honour of giving away this lady to him in the Church of St. Sulpice in Paris some eighteen years ago, she being then the famous actress, Sophy Vernon. She cannot be your wife, consequently, and will not, I know, deny the truth of my statement, of which abundant proofs exist, as she well knows, including her most respectable spouse in person."

"But why does she stare so at him?" asked the old man after a long pause, glancing at Crowe.

"Poor fellow," replied the manager in a low tone, "he is her son; she sold him to me years ago; he had a sweet voice, and I made something of him till he lost it. He is an honest fellow, is Crowe; she has been a brute to him as to every one else. Ah, sir, you are not her only dupe!"

The doctor's brougham now drove up to the door, a little confusion ensued, in the midst of which Lady Beauchamp, who had remained perfectly silent, disappeared. At his own request Rossi and Crowe helped to move the patient to his bed, and waited till the broken limb was set; but before the doctor had re-entered his brougham, Lady Beauchamp had driven off quietly and unquestioned in her own carriage to the nearest railway-station, carrying with her all the jewels and loose cash on which she could lay her hands. When the old man was subsequently informed of this, he only uttered a deep groan; it may have been grief—it may have been disappointment; it sounded very like a sigh of relief! Ah! what a life he had led since he picked up, at a foreign watering-place, that apparent mirror of virtue and propriety. Poor weak old creature! his property, his actions, his very soul had passed into her hands, and she had acted her part, the most important of all her rôles, with a perfection equalled only by the completeness of her depravity. She had joined a religious sect, and confined herself to the society of a few of its ministers, because she hoped amongst them to escape detection, and yet to command a certain amount of worship and admiration which was necessary to her happiness, but she looked eagerly forward to a day when she should be set at liberty to fly with her ill-gotten, yet hardly-earned, gain to a climate and habits more congenial to her tastes. The sudden appearance of her son and the well-known Rossi was a blow she had never anticipated.

As for poor Crowe, he was so accustomed to that peculiar form of misery, that his shame at this new discovery of his mother's infamy was soon overpowered by the delight of being sent to bring Mrs. Neville and her children to the bed-side of her father. It was a mission requiring delicacy and tenderness, and all felt none would acquit himself more satisfactorily than Crowe, whose gentle hand supplied the place of tact, talent, quickness—in short of everything in which he was deficient. His heart throbbed with pleasure as he knocked at the door. She herself opened it; her sweet, peculiar smile lighting up her face and his, as she welcomed him kindly. She led him in and resumed her work, and as Crowe remained silent awhile, she forgot, as she often did, his presence, and began singing a canonet of Haydn's, as she diligently plied her needle. Crowe's eyes filled with tears,

her voice always thrilled him so! She saw it, and changed her strain to something lively.

"Yes," he said, "you may choose a cheerful strain this day. You have had many griefs, Mrs. Neville; but they are drawing to a close; can you bear happiness as you have borne sorrow?"

"Alas! it was the happiness of success which made me so ill; but I think I can bear anything you may have in store for me;" and she smiled, expecting to hear of a new pupil, or something equally exciting.

Crowe hesitated as to his next step, when a new idea struck him.

"I want to take you to your happiness," he said; "half an hour's ride will bring you to a great joy."

She looked towards the children in the little back-garden.

"Martha will take care of them."

Still she smiled incredulously.

"But I have so much work to do, and a pupil in the afternoon."

Crowe was roused into consigning the pupil in question to so fearful a doom, that Mrs. Neville seemed startled into the belief that something must have happened.

"Pray don't refuse me," he urged.

"You are so kind, Crowe, that I cannot; but it is rather a wild-goose scheme, is it not?"

"Rely upon me, Mrs. Neville; dear me, am I not sober enough? It may be extraordinary; but it is plain, substantial reality."

And so they went together. Mrs. Neville in silent wonder; Crowe in equally silent exultation. But her perplexity increased as he led her into Sir John's house, and up the stairs into the bed-room. The curtains were drawn, she could hardly see the figure in the bed, but there was no doubt as to the voice which spoke:

"My child! my Agnes! can you forgive me for not forgiving you? Come back home to me, never leave me more! I have so longed for you!"

There was no reply, save by sobs and kisses, and soft-hearted Crowe could stand it no longer: he hastened away to fetch the children.

Henceforward, no fears for them. Mrs. Neville herself recovered gradually her former health, now the pressure of cares and anxiety was removed from her mind, but the remembrance of her ONE NIGHT ON THE STAGE influenced her whole life, as many an artist, worn out, or unfortunate, or desti-

tute can testify. And the poor, neglected Crowe found at last a genial, happy home, where still his ears were indulged with the beautiful singing of the "prima donna" of the house.

As for Smith, the fickle public, after pampering him for years, came to the conclusion that the genius was a humbug! He made a vain struggle to keep up his long-admitted claim, and then the great composer washed, shaved, and settled down into a respectable though somewhat misanthropical music-master.

Rossi will, I have no doubt, appear before the public next season, as he has done on so many previous occasions, but never

since has he made such a hit as on that one night of *Maude Percy's* debut.



CONFESSIONS OF A TOADSTOOL EATER.



differ in different places; toadstools are everywhere the same. Even in this country some people are occasionally disordered by eating the genuine mushroom. Cobbett was once; and, of course, ever afterwards abused mushrooms as unfit to be eaten by anybody. Mushrooms, however, like many good creatures, are liable to unjust censure. Anybody might well expect to be half-poisoned in consequence of eating them stale, in a state of decomposition, and swarming with insects.]

The fact that sundry native funguses, which lament in the familiar name of toadstools, are eatable, is one which I have personally verified. In making my own organisation the test of their properties, I have laid myself open to be told that I have shown a proper self-appreciation, inasmuch as the experiment has been tried on a body which, according to a celebrated axiom, is the kind of one most eligible for that purpose. My *corpus vile*, however, has not become *vilius* for the tentative use to which it has been thus applied. I have found all the alleged esculent fungi that I have eaten, and I have eaten considerable quantities of as many as I have been able to find, really esculent, and some of them excellent. None of them has ever disagreed with me in the least, except one called the *Agaricus personatus*, a fungus with a brownish purple cap and violet gills, which comes up about the end of October and the beginning of November. On two occasions, after breakfasting on this toadstool, I was afflicted with a stomach-ache, but I have eaten it many times without any such result. The truth is, that on both occasions, when it disagreed with me, I had had it cooked in a peculiar way, and it was not thoroughly done. The effects which it produced might have been equally caused by a piece of under-done pork or a half-boiled potato.

What could induce me to take to fungus-eating? Curiosity, and a certain fascination, exerted by the sort of magical physiognomy characteristic of these strange productions. This singularity of their aspect is generally felt. Their

among things not generally known to the British public is the fact that there are several funguses, besides the common mushroom, which are good to eat. With this fact, however, some other publics are familiar enough, as the Russian for instance, and the public of Rome and other parts of Italy. In the Papal states, indeed, British ideas on the subject of funguses are reversed. Here the received belief is that the common mushroom is the only one of the family which is not poisonous. There, whilst numerous varieties of what we call toadstools are consumed by the population, the common mushroom is accounted so unwholesome that the inspector of the fungus-market at Rome causes it to be thrown into the Tiber. The type of fungous orthodoxy in England is placed at the Holy See in the *Index Expurgatorius* of the victualling department. *Agaricus campestris anathema esto!* The reason of this is said to be that the qualities of the common mushroom, as contradistinguished from the rest of its tribe, vary with the soil whence it springs. Mushrooms

grotesque and fanciful forms and colours, and the marvellous rapidity with which they spring, have reflected a supernatural glimmer, so to speak, on their origin, and caused them to be imagined as the work of those airy spirits

whose sport

Is to make midnight mushrooms;

and the circles of seared turf, or dark-green grass, which are the favourite haunts of many of their various kinds, are actually, in common language, called fairy rings. Everywhere they have been associated in popular mythology with elves and hobgoblins. The Dutch call them "Duyvel's broot." I wanted to know whether the devil's victuals were as good as I had heard they were; and the weird, uncanny exterior of those vegetable marvels suggested that they might be found to be endowed with a choice mysticism of flavour. Such had always struck me as characterising the taste of the common mushroom, to which I expected to find theirs analogous. I had heard of a treatise, written by the late Dr. Badham, on the "Esculent Funguses of England," and had often entertained the thought of getting it. This occurred to me one day in passing Highley's shop in Fleet Street; but not knowing the price of the work, and unwilling to invest any large amount of capital in pleasing a whim, I walked on. In returning along the other side of the street, a few minutes afterwards, I saw the very volume at a bookstall. The price was half-a-guinea,—a hobby might be worth that. I accordingly disbursed so much—or so little—and

Badham, in the pursuit of gastronomical mycology, became my guide, philosopher, and friend. I can confidently recommend him to others who may be inclined to pursue the same path of investigation, which will conduct them through pleasant places, if they delight in woods and lanes.

If a second edition of this book has been published, some gross but obvious errors of typography and arrangement will, no doubt, have been corrected. It is pleasant reading—the sprightly work of a botanist and a scholar.

As yet I have been unable to test the merits of all the fungi enumerated by Badham as esculent. Of those which I have tasted, some, certainly, do deserve his commendations; but, I think, not all. In the first place, I have not found one of them preferable in flavour to the common mushroom, except the *Agaricus prunulus*, and perhaps the *Agaricus nebularius*. The first of these resembles, but surpasses, the ordinary mushroom, and has also a peculiar, and very delicate smack of its own, which is a little like its smell, and that may be compared to the perfume of clematis, or of bitter almonds, though I confess I have heard it likened to the scent of yellow soap. It is generally a white, cream-coloured, or whitish-brown fungus, sometimes, on being plucked, turning in some places faintly yellow, with a cap often lobed, very fleshy, thick, and when young, firm. The gills are at first colourless, as the cap expands they become slightly flesh-coloured, then assume a neutral tint, and lastly turn black. The stalk is very thick in proportion to the cap, and generally bulges much at the base. Badham says that this fungus appears only in the spring. He concluded this from observations which were perhaps too local. I have never found the *prunulus* before nearly the middle of June, and have met with some specimens as late as November. Like other fungi, it requires for the antecedents of its appearance, some amount of rain, particularly thundershowers, followed by moist temperate weather. It is very good broiled; but the best way of cooking it is to bake it, with a little butter, pepper, and salt, in an oven, on a plate, under a basin. A great quantity of gravy comes out of it, mingled, in the case of a good specimen, with omasome, which tastes very much like the similar brown exudation on the skin of a roast leg of mutton. An epicure with no particular weakness for funguses would accept the *prunulus* as a remarkably flavorful common mushroom; from which, however, it differs not only in conformation, and the other sensible properties, above-mentioned, but also in the capability of being dried, and of keeping in that state; whereas the common mushroom is deliquescent, and rots in two or three days. Cut into pieces, and allowed to dry, the *prunulus* may be kept for a year and more, for the purpose of being put into hashes and stews, which it choicely flavours.

The *prunulus* grows in parks and woods, sometimes near the foot of a tree, sometimes in the open, often in rings, generally in company, now and then solitary. In common with many other funguses, it comes up year after year in the same places. Those who have learned to love it, and

to look for it, will often be exasperated by finding the finest specimens knocked to pieces by the boys who have picked it for a mushroom, and destroyed it on supposing themselves to have discovered it to be a toadstool.

The *Agaricus nebularius* is a fungus which appears about the middle of October, generally in fairy rings, sometimes alone. It is at first nearly white, both cap and gills, but soon, especially in dry weather, the cap becomes brown, and the gills turn rather brownish. The latter are slightly decurrent; that is, instead of extending horizontally under the cap from circumference to centre, they run a little way down the stem in concave lines, delineating a form like that of a bell-mouthed wine-glass, only broader and shallower in proportion. This is a very excellent fungus: it has, in addition to the mushroom flavour, a certain piquancy, and it also contains much omasome, so that its flesh, of all the funguses that I know, possesses most their common characteristic of resembling meat. Broiling is the best way of cooking this toadstool; the process which develops its savour in the highest degree. When fresh gathered, on being cut or broken, it exhales an odour which has been compared to that of curd-cheese. Hence it is termed, in some places, the "New Cheese" mushroom. I suppose the *Agaricus nebularius* is identical with what the people in the North of England, meaning the same thing with botanists, call the Fog Mushroom. It does certainly come up in foggy weather, if that is what is intended by the word *nebularius*. Badham gives this toadstool the character of being pre-eminently light of digestion. I can indorse this testimony. Here may be mentioned the fact that several other kinds of toadstools have been found by me not only not to produce any dyspeptic symptoms, but actually to create, after having been eaten, a positive sense of comfort and wellbeing in the interior, like that which fortunate persons experience now and then when they have partaken of the results of very excellent cookery. Some French dishes are examples under the latter head; and British prejudice may suggest that the probable nature of their ingredients renders it no wonder that any sensations consequent on indulgence in them, should exactly resemble those to which I have compared their effects on the digestive system.

A very delicate and dainty toadstool is the *Boletus edulis*; a toadstool which would generally be called a regular one—emphatically a toadstool—a fungus not like a mushroom at all as to appearance, except in having a cap and a stalk. Instead of gills under the cap, it is furnished with tubes arranged perpendicularly, not horizontally, and standing close together, so as to present a surface consisting of their united orifices, which are at first closed, and, when the cap has just expanded, give its under part the appearance of being filled with drab-coloured cement, clay, or wax. Afterwards they open, and then the cap, beneath, looks like a mass of sponge, in colour and porosity very similar to the section of a piece of gingerbread. The outside of the cap varies from light, dark brown, or bronze, to bay or nearly black, or to a mixture of these tints. The stalk, when very

young, is white, soon turning to reddish brown, and is remarkable for being marked about the upper part with a minute net, or lattice-work, of darker lines. Under trees, in oak and other woods, is the habitation of this fungus, where it may be found in summer and autumn. I have gathered it as early as the middle of June. The *Boletus edulis* grows, in size, from the dimensions of a small tea-saucer to those of a large cheese-plate. It is a soft fat fungus, with beautifully white flesh, and, when baked or broiled, eats much like an omelette, with a slight taste of mushroom. It relishes all the better if dressed with fine herbs. Whether it would equally succeed as a substitute for a sweet omelette I cannot say, not having as yet tried it with currant-jelly or raspberry-jam.

About the latter end of September and the first half of October appears the *Agaricus procerus*, a fungus of no mean quality. It is, as its name implies, tall, often standing upwards of a foot in height, though dwarf specimens are also to be met with. The cap, from four to seven inches across, is shaggy on the outside, brownish white, or otherwise partridge coloured, sprinkled with scales of blackish scurf. In the centre there is a black rounded knob, very much like the black nose of a little dog. The stem (which is unfit to eat) is of a woody texture, figured with blackish markings, arranged similarly to those of a snake. The whole fungus bears a striking resemblance to a parasol or umbrella—a similitude increased by a broad membranous ring surrounding its upper part. The gills are nearly white, with a slight tinge of flesh colour. The flesh is quite white, of a light and springy texture. Simply cooked in an oven, this fungus has a sweetish somewhat mealy taste, with scarcely any mushroom flavour. It ought to be seasoned with a little garlic; and, with this addition, makes a good stew, which a blind man might take for tripe of unusual delicacy, uncommonly well cleansed. After cooking, the gills remain white; yet, if sprinkled with salt, in a few days they turn black, and the *Agaricus procerus* thus treated affords, though in comparatively small quantity, an excellent ketchup, which differs only from that of the common mushroom in being finer. The *Agaricus procerus* is fond of parks and commons, particularly flourishing in close proximity to furze-bushes and dead fern.

After rain, during autumn, the *Agaricus fusipes* comes up at some little distance from the roots of oaks. It is of middling size. The cap of this fungus is brown, often partially marked with blotches, which look like lamp-black or the film of soot that forms on the bars of a grate. The stalk is small, rather contorted; the gills are at first brownish white, and then of a rich dark bistre almost black. The taste of this fungus is much like that of the common mushroom.

The same may be said of the flavour of the *Agaricus atramentarius* and *Agaricus comatus*, two allied funguses found in fields, gardens, and waste places, in summer and autumn. The *atramentarius* (so called because it will serve to make ink) often grows in clumps or clusters on the stumps of trees. It is a greyish conical fungus with slate-coloured gills, and a smooth, straight,

whitish stem, about four inches high. Its closed cap is about as big as an egg. The *comatus* is all white, and of an oval form before it expands, softer than the *atramentarius*, and covered with a delicate moist scurf. When this fungus expands its margin becomes ragged, and divided, as it were, into locks, whence its name. The gills then turn black. These toadstools deliquesce rapidly, and, though good enough to eat, are best for ketchup. None but young specimens are fit for either purpose.

After rain, from July till late in the autumn, the *Agaricus heterophyllus* appears in woods and under trees. It is from three to five inches in diameter across the cap. This is a livid-looking toadstool, generally of the colour of an Orleans plum; yellow in some instances, in others lilac, sky-blue, or green. Its gills are white. Its stalk, externally, has the colour and appearance of spermaceti, and inside is of a sort of pithy texture. Badham praises this fungus too highly, unless some peculiar method of cookery which I am not aware of can render it worth cooking. It yields, however, a rich and savoury gravy, and a ketchup which, on cooling after having been boiled, deposits a quantity of jelly.

Champignon is a name commonly given to the small button mushroom. It is, however, a denomination properly belonging to the *Agaricus oreades*; a little buff fungus which, during all the summer and most of the autumn, after wet weather succeeded by sun, abounds in fields and meadows, and on strips of grass by the road-side. Fairy-rings are often thickly studded with it, which circumstance may have procured for it its classical name. The cap is conical, rather leathery; the gills are of a lighter tint than the cap; the stem is very tough and fibrous. This is an agreeable fungus, tasting a little like a mushroom, and having, like the *prunulus*, the advantage of keeping when dried, and in that state serving to flavour hashes and stews. It is impossible for any one who is well acquainted with this fungus to mistake it, but very possible for anybody else to mistake it for two rather similar toadstools which are deleterious.

Of the *Agaricus personatus* I can say nothing worse than that, if underdone, it will, as aforesaid, give its consumer a stomach-ache. It is hardly worth further description than what I have already given. This toadstool tastes a little like veal, and might make a tolerable accompaniment to a bit of bacon. That is the best I can say of it.

The *Cantharellus cibarius* is a small orange-yellow fungus with decurrent gills; it grows in the same season with the *procerus*, in the short grass and among the moss on commons and about woods. It has a faint smell of apricots. It makes a good fry, much like whitebait, and also does well in a stew.

Most wanderers amid forests have remarked an excrescence which looks like a mass of liver springing out of living oak trees. This is the *Fistulina hepatica*. When first formed, it resembles a tongue protruding from the tree; except that its colour at first is of a light yellowish red. In this state its upper surface is studded

with small papille, which heighten its tongue-like appearance. When torn, it turns red inside; its flesh assuming the look of beetroot, and emitting a smell like that of wine. Its taste is slightly acid. When old, it becomes dark brown, or nearly black. It appears throughout the summer. Cut into slices and fried, it tastes like very mild liver, with somewhat of the mushroom flavour, and a tartness like that imparted by a squeeze of lemon. Used for the same purposes as the truffle, it would probably be found preferable to that fungus.

Two of the puff-balls are very good to eat. Every schoolboy is familiar with these fungi, which he knows by the name of "snuff-boxes," but which the refinement of classical botany calls by the more dainty denomination *Lycoperdon*; the *Lycoperdon plumbeum* and the *Lycoperdon bovista*. The principal differences between them are that the latter is much the larger, is pear-shaped, fixed to the ground by a short stem, and covered on the outside with soft tender patches of membrane. The *Lycoperdon plumbeum* is generally smoother, though sometimes covered with



minute, light brown, bran-like scales. Its most usual colour is white; the hue also of the *bovista*. Both are full inside of a firm white pulp; which, if they are left to dry, turns into a light, impalpable powder: the "snuff" of the schoolboys. The fumes of this, when burnt, are said to exert on animals anæsthetic effects equal to those of chloroform. These puff-balls are alike in taste. They are best cut in slices, as the French cut potatoes, and fried with the yolk of egg. Their flavour then very nearly resembles that of sweetbread.

I have tasted one more of the British esculent fungi; the *Polyporus frondosus*, a greyish-brown, branching mass of fungus, growing at the base of the oak and other trees. When broiled, it

has much of the flavour of the genuine mushroom, the *Agaricus campestris*, or, to venture on a liberty of botanical nomenclature, the *Agaricus bonâ fide*. The first specimen I met with occurred in a hedge at the root of a hazel-nut tree, in a lane in Hampshire. Some little clowns with eyes and mouths wide open, watched my companion and myself whilst we were removing it, and, as we walked off with it, one of them hallooed after us:—

"That there be twooad's myecat!"

On another occasion, as we were gathering some specimens of the *Agaricus heterophyllus* in a copse, we received a like caution from a passing countryman of the same county:—

"They be rank pison!" he informed us in a loud voice, from a distance.

The connection between these productions and the reptiles with which they are nominally associated is quite imaginary. I have never yet seen a toad either seated on a toadstool, or crouching under one. No doubt toadstools have derived that name from peculiarities of conformation and colour, which give them an aspect of toadiness. Fat, bloated, mottled, many of them may seem the vegetable analogues of the toad. That reptile being accounted "ugly and venomous," their similarity to it in look has procured for them a corresponding character. But whereas the "precious jewel" which the toad has been credited with wearing in his head, is nothing more than a brilliant eye—"all my eye," as the toad might be excused for saying—sundry toadstools possess the really valuable property of serving for nutriment, as witness the undersigned. Instead of being only fit to be ingredients in a hell-broth, they are exceedingly good things to enter into the composition of a hash.

Are there any general rules by which wholesome toadstools can be distinguished from such as are poisonous? One only that can in any measure be relied on,—a pleasant taste is a pretty safe criterion of their wholesomeness. The converse of this, however, does not hold quite good: some eatable sorts are rather hot to the palate when uncooked. The proof of the toadstool is in the eating—cautiously tried; small quantities only being at first ventured on, and heat in the throat, or any other unpleasant sensation in that, or the continuous thoroughfare, being taken as a warning. Add to this, that the experiment should not be hazarded at all till the fungus in question has been carefully identified by reference to minute descriptions and accurate plates. By these precautions the explorer will be enabled to walk safely on the enchanted ground which engenders toadstools, and to banquet on its produce with impunity and satisfaction.

P. L.

